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A short vindication of
presbytery

A
SHORT VINDICATION
OF
PRESBYTERY,
&c. &c.

A
SHORT VINDICATION
OF
PRESBYTERY :

WITH TWELVE
ESSAYS ON THE CHURCH.

BY THE LATE
REV. GEORGE WHYTOCK,
MINISTER OF THE ASSOCIATE CONGREGATION, DALKEITH.

EDITED BY THE
REV. THOMAS M'CRIE,
EDINBURGH.



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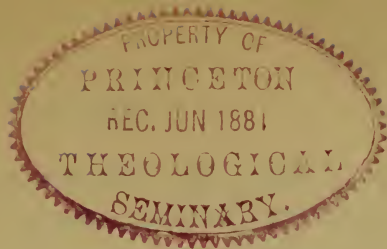
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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

THE first treatise in the following collection was originally published in the year 1799, under the following title—"A Short Vindication of Presbyterial Church-Government: Containing a Summary View of the Evidence in support of it from Scripture; together with an Examination of the Principal Arguments of the Independents against it. By George Whytock, Minister to the Associate Congregation at Dalkeith." This excellent treatise, which is highly esteemed by those who are acquainted with it, has been for a considerable time out of print; and it is now republished, at the suggestion of several friends, with a few notes, and some slight verbal alterations.

At the time when Mr Whytock's "Vindication" first appeared, the subject of church-government occupied very general attention, owing to the vigorous attempts then made by Independents to propagate their sentiments in Scotland;—attempts which were aided, in no small degree, by the excitement which followed on the labours of Whitefield and other zeal-

ous preachers. But while adapted to the state of the controversy as it then existed, the treatise is no less applicable to the present day. Though it is chiefly devoted to the vindication of the Presbyterian form of government from the objections of Independents, the evidence adduced in its support goes far, it is conceived, to establish it as the only form agreeable to the Word of God. Circumstances have, of late, given an adventitious prominence to the Prelatical controversy ; but it requires little reflection to foresee that this is not the question on which the friends of the Gospel are most likely to be divided. It is worthy of remark, that while neither Presbyterians nor Independents can well combine with Prelatists against each other, it is quite possible that both may heartily co-operate with each other against Prelacy. And now that the pretensions of the Hierarchy are advanced to such an extravagant and alarming pitch, it seems of great importance that the genuine friends of Christ, in order to meet the common enemy with greater prospect of success, should, if possible, come to a mutual understanding on the points of difference between them. Besides, it has been the opinion of the most intelligent and conscientious Presbyterians, that of the two forms of government opposed to Presbytery, the Congregational approaches much more nearly than the Prelatic to the Scriptural model ; and that, for this reason, the arguments of Independents are the more plausible and the

less easily answered. Since the publication of the following treatise, this approximation has become still closer; the Independent churches having become associated in what is termed a Congregational Union, which differs very little from a Presbyterian Union, except in name, and in its affairs not being so openly and avowedly conducted by official persons as in our Church-Courts. In fine, the late momentous disruption that has taken place in the Church of Scotland, portending as it does still more important movements in the religious world, will, in all probability, lead to the renewal of the Independent controversy, though, it is to be hoped, in a better spirit, and with a more successful issue, than in former days.

Mr Whytock's "Vindication" may prove a useful harbinger to these anticipated discussions. The main recommendations of this treatise are simplicity and comprehensiveness. It bears the impress of two leading traits in the Author's character,—mildness of temper and shrewdness of intellect. It exhibits, in a condensed, yet lucid, form, the leading arguments in favour of Presbytery, and is written in such a candid and dispassionate manner, that few can take offence at its statements.

The "Vindication" was reviewed, immediately after its appearance, in a small Baptist periodical, entitled *The Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine*, which was conducted by the late Dr Charles Stuart. In reply to

that review (which was continued in two numbers of the Magazine, and left unfinished in the last number which appeared, March 29. 1800), Mr Whytock sent some "Remarks," with a request that they might be inserted in the Magazine; but the article was returned to him, with an apology from the worthy editor for not inserting it, on the ground that the Magazine was forthwith to be given up. These Remarks have been preserved; and as they serve to prevent misapprehensions and anticipate objections which may occur to some on an important branch of the argument, it has been thought proper to print them as an Appendix to this volume. It is to be regretted that Dr Stuart's Magazine should have terminated its course in the middle of this controversy, as our Author might otherwise have had an opportunity of vindicating his treatise still more completely—a task which, if we may judge from the specimen here given, he would have accomplished most triumphantly. Such a discussion, however, has been rendered less necessary since the appearance of Dr Brown's able work on Presbytery.

The other pieces in the volume have been selected from the Author's numerous contributions to the pages of *The Christian Magazine*. Of this valuable periodical, Mr Whytock was for some years joint-editor with his friend the late Dr M'Crie. It would have been easy to have selected from the Author's contribu-

tions, others of a more practical and varied character ;¹ but it was judged better to confine the present collection to papers which bore some affinity to each other, and to the leading treatise in the volume. These have been arranged, in what appeared the most natural order of the subjects, under the title of *Essays on the Church*. Nothing seems more necessary in the present day, in so far as the public interests of religion and the union of its followers are concerned, than the diffusion of correct Scriptural views of the Christian Church ; and these Essays, embracing, as they do, a comprehensive view of the whole subject, and taking up some of its more interesting details, are well adapted to guard against errors and extremes, whether leading to the right or the left hand, and to furnish suggestions for more extended dissertations. The articles on *Baptism* and *Lay-Preaching* will commend themselves to the judicious reader, as pieces too valuable to be left buried in the obscure

¹ Besides the articles reprinted in this volume, Mr Whytock was the author of some excellent papers on the *Gospel* and *Faith*, in the second volume of the same Magazine, and of a series of learned and useful essays on *Sacred Chronology*, and two papers on *John Huss* and *Jerome of Prague*, in the eighth volume. In the ninth volume there is a series of papers on the *Opening of the Seals*, and the *Seven Trumpets*. His last unfinished article on the Sixth Trumpet is accompanied with this striking note, "*The author had proceeded thus far with this paper on the day preceding his death.*" To those who possess copies of the Christian Magazine, it may be interesting to know Mr Whytock's signatures, which were as follows:—"W."—"H."—"Clemens."—"Observator."—"Chronus."—"S——r."—"Ithuriel."

pages of an old Magazine. It may not be uninteresting to mention, that the idea of republishing Mr Whytock's Vindication, along with these papers, as now presented to the public, was suggested and warmly recommended many years ago by the late Dr M'Crie.

Instead of attempting any thing like a sketch of the life and character of the author, I shall content myself with appending to these remarks, a notice of him by Dr M'Crie, which appeared in the Christian Magazine at the time of his death. In regard to this brief memorial, it may be proper to state, that, besides the close intercourse which subsisted between these two Christian ministers as personal friends and literary associates,¹ they were united in those contentings about the Narrative and Testimony which issued, shortly after the death of Mr Whytock, in the separation of the Constitutional Presbytery from the General Associate Synod. This circumstance rendered the task of drawing up a character of our Author, for a periodical supported by the Synod, peculiarly delicate, and may partly account for its being expressed in more guarded terms than it might have been, had the writer been at liberty to give free scope to the deep feelings

¹ In addition to the Christian Magazine, which came under their joint superintendence in 1803, they were associated in the publication of a small piece, entitled, "A Conversation between John, a Baptist, and Ebenezer, a Seceder, on the Faith of the Gospel; occasioned by Mr M'Lean's Treatise on Christ's Commission to his Apostles." Edin. 1798.

of respect, gratitude, and affection, with which he cherished the memory of his departed friend. Such notices, indeed, must necessarily be very general; and, in the present case, though the prominent points are traced with great fidelity, so as to recall to the friends of the deceased many recollections connected with him, it is hardly possible, without the aid of these associations, for a stranger to form an adequate conception of the character of this excellent man and highly respected minister of Jesus Christ.

I have only to add that the present Edition has been prepared at the expense of Mr RICHARD WHYTOCK, Edinburgh, the only surviving son of the Author, who, after reserving so many copies for his private friends, has forwarded the remainder of the impression, amounting to 500 copies, as a donation to the EDUCATION FUND for the FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND; and the Publisher on his part has kindly undertaken their disposal for that object, without profit to himself or any charge beyond the necessary expenses.

T. M'C.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1843.

OBITUARY NOTICE OF MR WHYTOCK.

[*From the Christian Magazine for December 1805.*]

“ DIED at Dalkeith, on Thursday the 24th of October last (1805), the Reverend George Whytock, minister of the Associate Congregation there, in the 55th year of his age, and the 30th of his ministry.

“ Mr Whytock was born in the parish of Tippermuir, *anno* 1750. In the early part of his life, he was under the ministry of the Rev. Mr Troop of Perth, whom he was accustomed frequently to mention in terms of great respect, and of whose personal kindness to him he entertained an affectionate remembrance. He studied Divinity under the Rev. William Moncrieff of Alloa. On the 17th of April 1776, he was ordained to the holy ministry, and pastoral inspection of the Associate Congregation of Dalkeith.

“ About six or seven years ago, Mr Whytock laboured under an indisposition of body, by which he was for some time laid aside from public work ; but he recovered from it, was able to go about his usual labours, and even seemed to enjoy better health than he had done for many years previous to that illness.

During the last half year, an involuntary motion appeared in his cheek. Taking notice of this to a friend, who was not disposed to regard it in a serious light, he himself signified that he looked upon it as a warning of what he ought to be laying his account with. On his return from visiting a part of his congregation on Friday the 11th of October, he felt his speech affected, and could with difficulty articulate. He was, however, so far recovered as to be able to go through the public work of the following Sabbath, although with considerable pain. Sabbath, the 20th of that month, was the only day that he was laid aside from preaching. On Wednesday, he rode on horseback three miles into the country, to see a member of his congregation who was on her death-bed ; and, on his return home, he spoke with great satisfaction of the visit. About seven o'clock on Thursday morning, he was suddenly seized with an apoplectic fit, which deprived him, irrecoverably, of the power of speech and motion, and which in four hours put an end to his mortal life. From the nature of his last illness, he was prevented from speaking on his death-bed ; but that his mind had been for a considerable time turned to the subject of death, and was deeply impressed with it, appears from a Meditation on Psalm xc. 9, " We spend our years as a tale," written by him at the commencement of this year, and which was inserted in the Christian Magazine for January last, to which, particularly to the

concluding part of it, the attention of the reader is directed.

“ ‘ Let me consider these things seriously with application to myself. Another of my years is now spent, and, I have reason to acknowledge, very unprofitably. How many are, or whether there be any, yet to come, I know not. A new year is begun, and it is to me a matter of utter uncertainty, whether or not I shall see the end of it, or even a small portion of it. When I look back to the past year, I find it hath numbered with the dead many of my friends and acquaintances. When I look forward to the progress of the year now current, I know that, according to the ordinary course of Providence, many more will have done with time before the year expire. But how ready am I to forget that I may be one of those whom this year, and even an early period of it, will number with the dead ! I have no assurance of a day, or of an hour. ‘ Lord, make me to know mine end and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.’ Let my years or days, whether many or few, be spent in thy service, and for the purposes of thy glory. Let me be preserved from that dismal end which awaits the wicked, and prepared for that comfortable and happy end which thou hast appointed for thy people. And though my years should be spent in mournful affliction, let them end in joy and peace.’

“ The last sermon that he preached was from Mark, i. 11—‘ And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

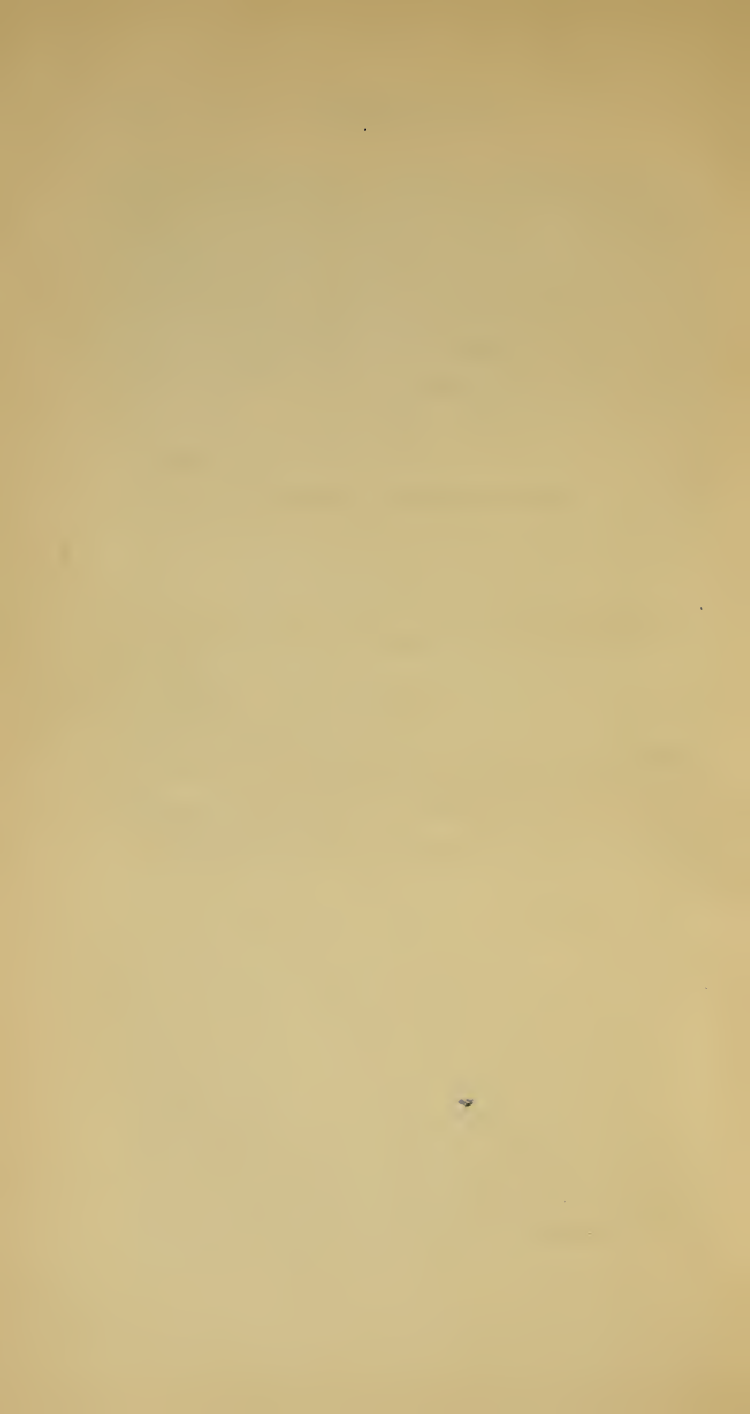
And the last sermon which he heard in his own meeting-house, on the Sabbath preceding his death, was preached from Philip. i. 23—‘ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.’

“ Mr Whytock naturally possessed an acute and discriminating mind, a solid judgment, and retentive memory, which he had improved by reading and thought. His views of divine truth were clear, accurate, and evangelical; his public discourses judicious and concise, adapted to increase the knowledge, and promote the edification, of his hearers, particularly those who sat under his stated ministrations. Without the ornaments of language, or the attractions of delivery, the solidity of his matter, and the seriousness of his manner, rendered him always acceptable, as a preacher, to the friends of gospel doctrine and practical religion. Though capable of examining a subject with philosophical accuracy, there was no appearance of abstraction or refinement of ideas in his discourses from the pulpit, but, throughout, a plainness and simplicity, level to a common capacity. The more private duties of his ministerial office he discharged with exemplary assiduity, painfulness, and condescension. Every one of his flock enjoyed in him, not only a faithful pastor, but a friend who was, in a more than ordinary degree, capable and disposed to give him advice in any affair

which was difficult or perplexing. His prudence, sagacity, and cool dispassionate temper, qualified him for being eminently useful as a member of ecclesiastical judicatories. Though neither destitute of feeling, nor regardless of his own character, he possessed great command of temper, equanimity, and patience under injury. In his family, he endeared himself by the most tender, affectionate, and sympathizing discharge of the duties of a husband and a father. Among his acquaintances, he was cheerful, open, and communicative. His friendship was unceremonious, but sincere and steady; it did not waste itself in complimentary professions, but was expressed in substantial acts of kindness. He departed without a stain upon his character, lamented by his acquaintances, by the members of his own congregation, and by persons of all denominations in the place where he lived.

“ Mr Whytock was sincerely attached to the Reformation-principles of the Church of Scotland, to which he continued steadily to adhere, ‘ through good report and bad report,’ to the end of his days. In the latter part of his life, he found himself under obligations to make an appearance in behalf of these principles, in the way of opposing certain changes lately made in the public profession of the body with which he was connected; although it was painful to him to differ from many whom he loved in the Lord, and subjected him to distress of mind which few who have not been in

the same circumstances are acquainted with, or can properly feel for. But under these trials he continued to be supported, by the testimony of his own conscience, and by the reflection, that he suffered them in a cause for the sake of which many had formerly endured similar and severer sufferings.’’



A

SHORT VINDICATION

OF

PRESBYTERIAL CHURCH-GOVERNMENT :

CONTAINING

A SUMMARY VIEW OF THE EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT
OF IT FROM SCRIPTURE ;

TOGETHER WITH

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS
OF THE INDEPENDENTS AGAINST IT.

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A

SHORT VINDICATION

OF

PRESBYTERY.

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A spirit of inquiry, in reference to matters both civil and religious, is a distinguishing character of the present age. This, under proper regulation, and managed with caution, is very commendable, and may be very profitable, but otherwise may prove very hurtful. A fondness for novelty frequently supplies the want of proof, and erroneous opinions, long ago refuted, are often cherished as new discoveries of truth. This, we apprehend, will, in a great measure, apply to the attachment of many, in the present time, to the principles of Independents or Congregationalists, in reference to the order and government of the church. Arguments, often refuted, are again brought forward with a degree of confidence as if they were unanswerable, and little or no account is made of what has been said in refutation of them. It might, therefore, be sufficient

to refer to the writings published on this subject in the last century, in which the controversy about church-government is fully discussed ; but these are not to be readily met with, and, besides, the majority of readers have neither ability nor leisure to examine such a mass of matter as these writings contain.

The peculiar sentiments of Independents in reference to church-government may be reduced to three heads. 1. They maintain—that the churches mentioned in the New Testament were all congregational, and consisted only of such a number as did, or could, all meet in one place for the exercises of religious worship, or, at least, for government and discipline. 2. They maintain—that the government and discipline of the church belongs to, and is to be exercised by, the members of the church in common, and that in this matter the elders, or office-bearers, are only to act as presidents and moderators for preserving order. 3. As a consequence of this, they maintain—that, in the exercise of government and discipline, every church, as they call it, that is, every congregation, is INDEPENDENT, and unconnected with any other church, except in as far as it may apply for, and receive advice about, any matter of difficulty.

Some of these principles are adopted with certain modifications, but, in the substance of them, all Independents are agreed. In order properly to examine them, it may be necessary, in the first place, to take notice of the different acceptations of the word *Church* in the New Testament. 1. The church is sometimes mentioned in reference to its invisible state, and as it

is in the sight of God ; and under this designation is comprehended the whole redeemed company, the whole body of believers, or all the elect of God, as called out of the world and separated from it. So we read, “ that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church.”<sup>1</sup> So also we read of “ the general assembly and church of the First-born which are written in heaven.”<sup>2</sup> And there are many other places of Scripture where such things are spoken concerning the church as are applicable to it only in this view. 2. The church is sometimes spoken of in reference to its external and visible state ; and in this view it comprehends both real saints and hypocrites, even all who make a credible profession of faith in Christ and subjection to him ; or rather, it “ consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, and of their children.”<sup>3</sup> In this catholic and comprehensive sense, the term is often used, particularly where it is said, “ And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers,” &c.<sup>4</sup> This designation primarily belongs to the whole body of Christians ; hence it is also frequently given to a part, because of its relation to the whole ; and the part particularly meant is determined by what is said concerning it, and by other circumstances, whether it be that part of the church which is employed in a ministry,<sup>5</sup> or that part which is ministered unto.<sup>6</sup> Just as in the natural body, the general term is often used, when the eye, the ear, the hand, or some particular

<sup>1</sup> Eph. v. 25, 27.<sup>3</sup> West. Conf. ch. xxv.<sup>5</sup> Matth. xviii. 17.<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 23.<sup>4</sup> 1. Cor. xii. 28.<sup>6</sup> Acts, xx. 28.

member is especially meant.<sup>1</sup> 3. The designation *a church* is frequently given to a particular association of Christians. Accordingly, we read of the church at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Ephesus, at Corinth, &c., and we read also of a church in certain houses.<sup>2</sup> These associations seem to get the name of churches, because of their relation to the church universal, and each of them severally is called a church, because of some particular connection in which the members of it stand to one another, besides what they have to the church in general. But as the controversy is concerning these particular churches, the peculiar nature of them must be afterwards ascertained. 4. An assembly of Christians actually convened in one place for religious purposes, is also called a church. “When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you.”<sup>3</sup> “In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding,” &c. “Let him keep silence in the church.”<sup>4</sup> “Let your women keep silence in the churches,—for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”<sup>5</sup> It is evident that in these texts the assembly or church-meeting is intended, for it is the disorderly management of such meetings that the apostle reproves. And though this be not the most ordinary acceptation of the word *Church* in the New Testament, it comes nearer to its original meaning, which is an assembly; and is applied to those which are of a civil, and even of a riotous nature, as when

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xvi. 5.; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.; Col. iv. 15.; Philem. verse 2.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 19.      <sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 28.      <sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

it is said, “ the *assembly* was confused ; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.” — “ But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful *assembly*” — “ And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the *assembly*.”<sup>1</sup> The original word which in these verses is translated *assembly*, is the very same that is ordinarily translated *Church*.

## PART I.

### OF THE NATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES.

Independents plead—that all the particular churches mentioned in the New Testament were *Congregational* ; that they consisted only of such a number as might, and actually did, meet in one place for the exercises of public worship, government, and discipline ; and that wherever we read of one church, or when the Christians in any place are called a church, in the singular number, we are to understand it as meaning only such a congregational church ; but that where there are more congregations than one, they are always called churches ; of this they are, in general, so confident, as to be willing to rest the whole controversy on it. On the other hand, Presbyterians maintain—that the churches mentioned in the New Testament generally consisted of a plurality of congregations under the in-

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xix. 32, 39, 41.

spection of one Presbytery. How far, and in what degree, the elders severally might have a fixed charge in respect of the different congregations, they do not determine. Some regular order in that matter was undoubtedly necessary for the more advantageous exercise of their ministry; but the several congregations were, nevertheless, under the joint inspection of one Presbytery. It is also admitted that one congregation or assembly is called a church, while yet it may be so connected with other congregations under one Presbytery, as that they all, including it, may be called one church. In confirmation of this we must come to particulars, and consider the account of these churches which is given in the New Testament.

I. We shall begin with THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM. It was first organized, and when other particular churches came to be erected, they were no doubt formed after the pattern of that church. That there was a plurality of congregations in Jerusalem might be evinced from various considerations. The number of Christians there was so great that they could not possibly all meet in one assembly for religious worship, far less for the exercise of government and discipline, as Independents allege. To the number of disciples who already belonged to the church, there were added, on the day of Pentecost, "three thousand souls."<sup>1</sup> It is said, "Many of them who heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand."<sup>2</sup> Now, even though it should be admitted that there was

<sup>1</sup> Acts, ii. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, iv. 4.



a greater proportion of males than ordinary, on account of the resort of strangers to Jerusalem at that time, and that these five thousand included all the males who then belonged to the church, yet these, along with a considerable portion of women, were such a multitude as could not be edified in one congregation. After this we read, "That believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."<sup>1</sup> It is not a small number that would be spoken of in that way after the many thousands already mentioned. We have yet a further account of the great increase of that church. "In those days—the number of the disciples was multiplied,"—"The word of God increased, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly (or exceedingly), and a great number of priests were obedient to the faith."<sup>2</sup> It would be most extravagant to suppose, that all this is meant, only of such a number as could convene in one congregation for religious worship. Further, the number of elders, apostles, and other ministers of the word, who continued all this time at Jerusalem, must prevent the supposition of there being but one congregation. Taking in the seventy whom Christ had commissioned to preach the Gospel, their number would amount to nearly an hundred; and though some of them might be in Galilee, yet all the apostles and several other elders were in Jerusalem, and so busied in the ministry of the word, that it was found necessary to choose and appoint certain deacons to manage the temporal concerns of the church. Shall it

<sup>1</sup> Acts, v. 14.<sup>2</sup> Acts, vi. 1, 7.

be thought that this church was only a single congregation ?

In opposition to all this it is urged—that the Scripture expressly says that they “all were together”—“*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ*,” in one place.<sup>1</sup> The words *ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ*, are fully translated by our English word *together*;<sup>2</sup> and either of these expressions intimates that the disciples assembled, but neither of them intimates that they all met in one assembly. In another place, the apostles address God in the following words—“The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers were gathered (*ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ*) together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together.”<sup>3</sup> Will any one from this pretend to conclude that all who are here mentioned did actually convene in one assembly about this business ? If one should tell me that all the Christians in Edinburgh meet together on the Lord’s day for religious worship, it would be a very false conclusion to infer that they all meet in one house, or in one assembly.—“Nay but,” say our opponents, “the place is mentioned, the Temple,<sup>4</sup> in Solomon’s porch.”<sup>5</sup> No doubt, the Christian Jews, as well as others, went to the Temple at the hours of prayer, and the apostles also attended and preached to the people ; but all to whom they preached there did not belong to the church, nor could the voice of one man reach to such a multitude. There

<sup>1</sup> Acts, ii. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, iv. 26. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Acts, v. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, iii. i.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, ii. 46.



was sufficient room in the Court of the Temple for each of the apostles to address a separate assembly, without disturbing one another ; and we are told that they held their assemblies in dwelling-houses also ; nor is it likely that they were suffered to hold their assemblies in the Temple for any length of time, much less that they would have access to dispense all ordinances there.

It is, therefore, supposed by some, that though the whole church convened in the Temple for some parts of public worship, yet they were obliged to dispense and receive the sacrament of the Supper in other places. But either these other places were churches, and assemblies for the worship of God, or private communion is warrantable, which, it is supposed, few of our opponents will admit.—It is further pleaded, that a great, or the greater, part of those mentioned as converted at Jerusalem, were strangers, and as they soon removed to their own home, the church at Jerusalem might be reduced to a very moderate congregation. No doubt, many of them were strangers, but there is no ground to suppose that they were the greater part. And many of them probably continued at Jerusalem for the sake of fellowship with the apostles. We read of the Grecians as well as Hebrews.<sup>1</sup> A persecution was necessary to drive them from Jerusalem, and to disperse them. Besides, admitting that a great many removed from Jerusalem in a very short time ; yet, while they remained, they were members of that church, for we read of no other there to which they belonged, and in

<sup>1</sup> Acts, vi. 1.

which they had communion in the ordinances. To suppose a great number of Christians who do not belong to any church, is a fancy that has no foundation in the Word of God.—The only thing further that can be urged, with any show of argument, is what is recorded concerning the choice of the deacons.<sup>1</sup> But it was not necessary that all the multitude should convene in one assembly for that purpose. There were various methods to intimate to them the necessity of this measure, and to collect their minds in the choice, without attempting what was impracticable—to convene them all in one assembly.

2. THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH may be fixed on as another instance of a Presbyterian church, consisting of a plurality of congregations under the oversight of one Presbytery. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch, which designation soon became general; and even that is a reason for believing that they were very numerous, seeing the name which was given to them was so readily applied to the whole body. Antioch was, next to Rome and Alexandria, the greatest city in the world, of which we have any account in history; and it was from thence that the Gospel was spread among the heathen. It would appear that the gospel had great success in that city. Some of those who were driven from Jerusalem by the persecution came thither, and though at first they preached the Gospel only to the Grecian Jews, it is said “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a *great number* be-

<sup>1</sup> Acts, vi. 1–7.

lieved and turned to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Upon the news of this, Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to their assistance, and by his ministry “much people was added unto the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> Finding yet occasion for further labourers in that harvest, he went to Tarsus and brought Saul, and they, with the other teachers, “assembled themselves with the church a whole year, and taught much people.”<sup>3</sup> This was a further accession to the former multitudes. In a famine that happened soon after, they made a contribution for the brethren in Judea, and it was so considerable that Barnabas and Saul were sent with it to the elders at Jerusalem. There was also a considerable number of prophets and teachers in that church.<sup>4</sup> Paul and Barnabas “abode long time” with them after their return from their first tour among the Gentiles, and afterwards Judas and Silas, as well as these two, continued some time at Antioch.<sup>5</sup> Still, however, the disciples at Antioch are mentioned as one church. And is it credible that no more is meant thereby than one single congregation and its elders, notwithstanding all the account we have of the eminent work of God in that place? Or can we suppose that so many eminent ministers would attend upon one single congregation, while there was so much work for them elsewhere? It is indeed said, when they returned from Jerusalem with the letter concerning the freedom of the Gentiles from the law of Moses, that they “gathered the multitude together,” and delivered it.<sup>6</sup> But this objection is already answered. The

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xi. 20, 21.<sup>3</sup> Acts, xi. 26.<sup>5</sup> Acts, xv. 31, 36.<sup>2</sup> Acts, xi. 24.<sup>4</sup> Acts, xiii. 1.<sup>6</sup> Acts, xv. 30.

multitude were really gathered together, but in different assemblies, as the most expeditious and practicable method of communicating the judgment of the apostles and elders on this important and interesting subject. The letter was probably read in the several worshipping assemblies.

3. THE CHURCH OF CORINTH may be in the next place considered. It is repeatedly addressed as one,<sup>1</sup> and for that reason Independents contend that it was what they call a congregational church. But we have better reason to believe that it consisted of a plurality of congregations, though those were all connected as one church, by being under the inspection of one Presbytery. By all the accounts we have of it in Scripture, it appears to have been very numerous, and well supplied with office-bearers, endowed with a variety of miraculous gifts. The first time that Paul went there, he continued a year and six months. He had for assistants Silas and Timothy, both eminent ministers. "Many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptised," and Paul was encouraged to persevere in his labours among them, by the Lord assuring him, in a vision, that he had "much people" in that place.<sup>2</sup> Paul had not been long away till Apollos came to them, whose ministry was remarkably successful. Now, it can hardly be supposed that such an account would be given of the great success of the Gospel in such a large city as Corinth, if it amounted to no more than what took place in Cenchrea. This was the port-town

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 2.; 2 Cor. i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xviii. 8, 11.

of Corinth, at a very small distance from it; and we are told<sup>1</sup> that there was a church there, which affords considerable evidence that the church at Corinth was such as we plead for. It may be that the church at Cenchrea was only a single congregation, and a part of the church at Corinth, as being under the same Presbytery; and if so, it is a proof of a Presbyterian church consisting of a plurality of congregations. But even supposing that the church at Cenchrea was altogether distinct from that at Corinth, or not connected with it through the same Presbytery, it, nevertheless, affords considerable evidence, that the Christians at Corinth were much more numerous than could worship, or be edified, in one assembly. Much notice is taken of the success of the Gospel at Corinth, and mention is made of the Lord having much people in that place; while the church at Cenchrea, though in the immediate neighbourhood, is never mentioned but once, and that as it were by-the-bye, in a reference to Phœbe, a servant of it. And can any think that this would have been the case, if there had been no more difference between these two churches than that between a larger and a smaller congregation?

There is yet further evidence that there was a plurality of congregations, or church assemblies, in Corinth, for they are expressly mentioned in the following terms; "Let your women keep silence in the *churches*,—for it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church."<sup>2</sup> It is vain to plead that the churches here meant are not those

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xvi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35.

of Corinth, but of other places, such as the churches of Judea, of Galatia, or of Macedonia ; for what had the women of Corinth to do in these churches, so as to need a prohibition from preaching, or speaking in them ? However improperly some of them might be disposed to conduct themselves in their own churches, there is no reason to think that they were itinerants. They are referred to their own husbands “ at home,” to whom they were to apply for information about any thing which they might not well understand, rather than to make inquiry in public.

There is one text, however, which is much urged as a proof that the church at Corinth consisted only of one congregation. “ If, therefore,” says the Apostle, “ the *whole church be come together into one place*, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad ?”<sup>1</sup> This is thought by some a decisive proof that the church at Corinth was no other than what might, and actually did, all meet in one congregation for the purposes of church-fellowship ; but a little attention to the words may serve to abate their confidence in this proof. The apostle here is only making a supposition for convincing the members of that church of the irregularity of their conduct. Their office-bearers were proud of their gifts, and forward to shew them ; particularly, they were fond of speaking strange languages, without attending to the edification of the church : And the apostle asks them what sort of appearance it would

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 23.



have to strangers, coming in to their assembly, to find the preachers running on in a language they did not understand. They would surely reckon them mad. Still, it will be said, the apostle makes a supposition that the whole church might come together in one place, which he would not have done if such a thing had been impracticable. But, admitting that by the whole church here the apostle means all the Christians at Corinth, the words do not necessarily bear that they were all to convene in one assembly. It has been already observed, that the Christians of a great city may with propriety be said to assemble together for religious worship, while yet they do so in different congregations. But, it is urged, "the apostle mentions expressly one place." The words *ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό*, rendered "in one place," are, as was formerly shown, of the same import with our *together*, and are usually rendered by it: And the reason why they are not so rendered here, seems to be, that the word *together* is already used in the translation of another word, which is rendered *come together*. This word signifies to meet or convene, and it would have been no unusual expression to have said, "if the whole church convene or meet together." But there is no reason why, by the whole church here, we should understand all the Christians in Corinth, any more than there is reason to conclude, that all these Christians spake with tongues and prophesied when they met; for the apostle uses an universal term about this, as well as about their meeting. It is well known, that universal terms are limited according as the subject spoken

of requires. By the church here we are to understand, not all the Christians at Corinth, but an assembly convened for religious worship, for so the word is to be understood in the preceding context ;<sup>1</sup> and it will apply to any assembly that might be in Corinth, in which there was a number of public speakers, and, therefore, cannot be a proof that there was no more than one. If in a letter to the Christians in Edinburgh, for example, one should say, “ If the whole congregation convene, and the minister talk Greek or Latin,” &c., would that expression intimate that there is only one congregation in that city ? Surely not. And the apostle might with great propriety speak, in the singular number, of one congregation, or church-assembly, notwithstanding that there were several of these in Corinth, because the irregularities he mentions, and the reproofs and directions he gives, were applicable to them all. The same answer will apply to the objection that is brought from the eleventh chapter of the same epistle, “ When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you ; and I partly believe it.” “ When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>2</sup> The expression of their “ coming together into one place,” in the latter verse, is of the same import with their “ coming together in the church,” in the former, and it refers to their assembling in a church-meeting. It intimates, that it was in the congregation, or when they assembled for religious worship, that these dis-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 4, 5, 19.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 18, 20.



orders took place ; and because they were common, he speaks in the general ; but this by no means implies that there was no congregation except one. There is nothing more common in every language, than to use the singular number, when that which is spoken applies to all the particulars of which the whole is composed.

4. THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS is another instance of what we plead for. It is still mentioned as one church ;<sup>1</sup> and hence Independents insist, and struggle hard to prove, that it consisted only of one single congregation. But there are many considerations which may evince the contrary. Paul continued there “ for the space of three years.”<sup>2</sup> And he was not alone. Luke, Timothy, Titus, Sosthenes, and Apollos, were sometime with him ; at least, they were going and coming.<sup>3</sup> There were besides, twelve men, endued with miraculous gifts, who “ spake with tongues and prophesied,”<sup>4</sup> and who probably became the elders of that church. His long stay in that place he himself accounts for. “ But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost ; for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”<sup>5</sup> Now, the account of matters in the nineteenth of the Acts, is a commentary on this, and is such as to assure us that the success of the Gospel there was very great and uncommon. The Gospel was preached to multitudes, and “ all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xx. 17, 28 ; Rev. ii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, xix. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xx. 31.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. i. 1. ; iv. 17. ; xvi. 11.

and Greeks,"<sup>1</sup> God was pleased to confirm the Gospel with a great number of miracles.<sup>2</sup> "The word of God grew mightily, and prevailed."<sup>3</sup> This was evidenced by the multitude of those who came openly, and made a bonfire of their magical books, the price of which amounted to "fifty thousand pieces of silver."<sup>4</sup> Books were then in manuscript, and consequently dear, but they would also be for that reason very scarce; and the multitude of converts who could furnish such a number of books of that kind, must have been very considerable, even supposing they were valued at ten pieces each. Further, in estimating the number of converts at Ephesus, the testimony of Demetrius, the silversmith, is not to be overlooked. He was alarmed lest his trade of making shrines for Diana should be ruined, and told the craftsmen, and others of like occupation, in what danger their religion and their gain were placed by the success of Paul's preaching, and by his turning away much people from the worship of false gods. However disposed he might be to magnify the danger, in order to excite an uproar, he certainly felt his trade hurt; but it is altogether incredible, that, in such a place as Ephesus, the metropolis of a large and populous country, the trade of these image-makers could be sensibly affected by the loss of a number of customers,—no greater than would make up one single congregation.

It has been said, that all this is but circumstantial evidence, and amounts to nothing; especially as we

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xix. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, xix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xix. 11-18.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, xix. 19.

are expressly told, that Paul separated the disciples, and disputed daily in the school of one Tyrannus, continuing to do so for the space of two years ;<sup>1</sup> and as the church there is spoken of as one flock.<sup>2</sup> But circumstantial evidence is of considerable weight. Sometimes it is more convincing than direct testimony. As to what is said of Paul's making use of the School of Tyrannus, it will by no means prove that there was no other congregation than that which might assemble there. Paul himself could minister only to one assembly at once, and that was the place he usually occupied after he withdrew from the synagogue ; but it is not said that his labours were confined to that place, neither was he the only preacher at Ephesus. And though the church there be still mentioned as one, this is no proof at all that it was what is called congregational : Nay, that it really consisted of more than one congregation, there is the most direct evidence. There was a congregational church in the house of Aquila. "The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house."<sup>3</sup> This was written from Ephesus, where Aquila and Priscilla were residing at that time.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xix. 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xx. 28.

<sup>3</sup> 1. Cor. xvi. 19.—"The church that is in their house ;" "*ἡ κατ' οἶκον τινος ἐκκλησία.*" "The church," says Robinson's Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, "which meets at the house of any one," "meaning thereby," says Bloomfield's Greek Testament with notes, "not 'their own family,' but 'the congregation that was accustomed to meet for divine worship at their house.'" This sense of the phrase is adopted by the Greek commentators, and by Mede, Wells, Pearce, Jaspis, Slade, and others, among the moderns.—ED.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 8.

They had been at Corinth with Paul, and went with him to Ephesus, where he left them till his return from Jerusalem. And it was at Ephesus they met with Apollos, “and instructed him in the way of God more perfectly.”<sup>1</sup> It is vain to evade this by saying, “that many of these churches had no other accommodation than the private house of an individual.” For the question is not, Whether the Christians then assembled in private houses? but, Whether this church in the house of Aquila was all that was in Ephesus? If it was, it would certainly have been named, as in other places, the church at Ephesus, and have got its denomination from the city, and not from a private house. Of this some Independents are so sensible, that they altogether explain away the word *church*, as here applied, and allege, that the apostle only means a religious family. But this is a fancy that never would have been entertained, except for the sake of supporting their notions of independent congregations. When the apostle speaks of a family, he always calls it by its own name, a house or household.<sup>2</sup> Neither have we any account of a family belonging to Aquila and Priscilla. We read of them coming from Rome to Corinth, and of their travelling with Paul from thence to Ephesus; but there is no mention of any family along with them. They were zealous Christians, dear companions of Paul, who risked their own lives for his preservation; and wherever they were, they laid themselves out to serve the church. At Ephesus they gave accommoda-

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xviii. 18–26.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. i. 16; xvi. 15.

tion in their house to a church-meeting, and they did the same afterwards at Rome upon their return thither.<sup>1</sup> And it would seem, that this was not some meeting of church members merely occasional, but that a certain number of them *statedly* held their church-meeting in that house, and were known to do so ; otherwise, to send a salutation to them, or from them, would have been altogether uncertain and vague, nor could any know who were meant.

This argument will also prove that there was a plurality of congregations at Rome ; as the Christians there, though not expressly called one church, are still addressed as such. The apostle salutes the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla ;<sup>1</sup> but it is evident these are only a part of the Christians at Rome ; for the apostle salutes many besides, who must have been connected with some other congregation. And there is ground to believe that there were several. Rome was then the greatest city of the world, and the church there was very famous, even before Paul had gone to it.<sup>2</sup> It must have greatly increased afterwards under his ministry, and that of many other eminent preachers ; yet still it was spoken of as one church ; and it always continued to be so, even after it increased to many congregations. It has indeed been contended, that “ the churches continued congregational for nearly two hundred years,—the whole body of the church ordinarily meeting together in one place, for the solemn administration of the holy ordinances of worship :” but

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xvi. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 8.

no assertion can be more groundless. About the year 250, immediately after the most severe persecution which the church had yet experienced, so that the number cannot be supposed to be much greater than it was fifty years before, the presbyters, or teaching elders, in the church at Rome amounted to forty-six, and the poor, who were supported by the alms of the church, were above one thousand and five hundred.<sup>1</sup> How absurd is it then to suppose, that the whole body of the church consisted only of such a number as might meet in one place for solemn ordinances ! or, that nearly fifty preachers were necessary to one congregation or assembly ! It is unnecessary to spend more time on this part of the subject.

## PART II.

### THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH.

It is agreed both by Presbyterians and Independents, that some government is necessary, and that a certain form of it is of divine institution. But they are not agreed what that form is, and particularly, in whom the power of exercising it is lodged. According to the general sentiments of Independents, though they do not all express themselves about it in the same manner, it is lodged in the congregation, or belongs to the people at large. Some maintain, that

<sup>1</sup> Euseb. Hist. lib. vi. c. 43.



the people, along with the elders or office-bearers, have a power of judging in all matters of church-government, and that the elders can do nothing therein but with their concurrence. And although they pretend to allow some power to the elders, yet in this case, it is evident, that nothing more is meant than that of moderators to state the business, to keep order, to put the question, and the like; for still it is the people who determine the point, and in them, in fact, the power is wholly lodged. Others, again, seem to give all power of government to the elders, while they pretend to “ ascribe to the people no other interest or share in the government, but that they may be *ruled by their own consent*.” But this expression is very ambiguous, and it will be found that the same thing is meant by it, which others express by the concurrence or determination of the people. Presbyterians do not say that the elders can rule the people otherwise than by their own consent. They do not force them either to become, or to continue, members of the church; and all exercise of government towards them can only be in consequence of their voluntary subjection, in the Lord, to that government which he hath appointed. When, therefore, Independents speak of ruling the people by a consent different from this, they must mean, and, in fact, they do mean, that the elders cannot proceed in particular instances of rule and government, till they first obtain the consent of the people: so that, in whatever way they express themselves, their sentiment is materially the same—viz., that it is the people who must give the decision.

Presbyterians, on the other hand, maintain that Christ, having appointed certain office-bearers in his church, hath committed to them, and not to the people at large, the rule and government thereof, according to his word. None, however, may assume this power to themselves, nor may they exercise it in an arbitrary way, or according to their pleasure. Office-bearers must be duly called and admitted, agreeably to the rules laid down in the word. Their rule must be exercised according to the laws that Christ hath prescribed; and all due pains should be taken to satisfy the people that it is so, in order that they may yield a conscientious submission. Independents frequently throw out a great deal of declamation against the power claimed and exercised by office-bearers, according to the Presbyterian plan, as if it were an unwarrantable dominion over the consciences of other church-members, and an encroachment on their liberty. But all the power claimed by them is only ministerial, that is, power to apply the laws of Christ as he hath prescribed in his word: And it is only as they proceed according to the word, that the consciences of church-members can be bound by their decisions. The Lord Christ is the only Lawgiver in the church, and no man, or body of men, has any power to make laws to bind the conscience, or to rule God's heritage according to pleasure. There is, notwithstanding, a ministerial power given by Christ, "an authority which the Lord hath given for edification and not for destruction."<sup>1</sup> There is a

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 8.



power, or which is the same thing, a warrant by the authority of Christ, to exercise rule and government in his church, in the way of applying the laws which he has enacted, to the cases that occur. And this power, or authority, is not given to the members of the church in general, but to such of them as are duly called and admitted to office.

That the rule and government of the church are not committed to the members in general, but to those who are called to that office, is evident from various considerations. It is evident from the names which are given to certain members of the church as distinguished from others. They are such names and designations as import rule and government. They are called Elders,<sup>1</sup> and as they are not so called on account of their age, it must be on account of their authority. They are called Bishops or Overseers.<sup>2</sup> They are called Pastors or Shepherds, and, as such, it is their duty not only to see that the flock be provided with proper pasture, but also to rule and govern the flock: and the same word which is rendered to *feed*,<sup>3</sup> is in other places rendered to rule.<sup>4</sup> They are Officers and Stewards,<sup>5</sup> because it is their business, ministerially, to manage the concerns of Christ's family. They are called Leaders and Guides,<sup>6</sup> who are to be followed—Rulers and Governors,<sup>7</sup> who are to be obeyed and submitted to. All these names and designations, expressive of authority for rule and

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xiv. 23; xx. 17.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xx. 28; 1 Tim. iii. 1, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. xiii. 7, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, xx. 28; 1 Pet. v. 2.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 28; 1 Thess. v. 12;

<sup>4</sup> Rev. ii. 27; xii. 5.

1 Tim. v. 17.

government, are appropriated to them who bear office in the church : And there is not the least hint given in the New Testament, that the power thus committed to them is restricted to some things only, and does not extend to all the government of the church.

That the government of the church is committed to persons in office, and not to the members in general, is also evident by this, that certain qualifications are required as necessary in those who are thereunto admitted ;<sup>1</sup> and the directions for the due exercise of rule and government, are addressed, not to the members of the church in general, but to those in office. The ruler is enjoined to act with diligence.<sup>2</sup> The elders are exhorted to feed and rule the flock of God, to be overseers willingly, and not to domineer over God's heritage, but to be ensamples to the flock.<sup>3</sup> Independents, indeed, admit, that their elders or office-bearers are rulers, and that directions are addressed to them about the due exercise of all *that* rule which is competent to them ; but they say, that this does not exclude the people from all interest or share in the government of the church. But this division of government between the elders and other members is without any foundation in the word : It speaks of no government, and gives no direction concerning the exercise of any, but that which is committed to the elders, and which is the whole government of the church under Christ. All the rule and government which Independents acknowledge to belong to their elders is very little, and scarcely deserves the name. It amounts to

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xiii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. v. 2, 3.

little more than to act as moderators of the assembly, to state the question, collect the votes, and to declare the judgment of the church ; so that all their government, if it may be so called, is confined and limited to the time during which they are presiding and keeping order in a meeting of the congregation. The real government is still claimed and exercised by the people, as it is by their voice that matters concerning the church are determined ; yea, if a member dispute the propriety of the elder's conduct in keeping him to order, this point also is determined by the voice of the church. The congregation, therefore, in fact rules the elders, and not the elders the congregation.

But, in order to set this matter in a clearer light, it is necessary to come to particulars, and to consider some of the principal matters in relation to which church-government is exercised. These are,—the appointment and ordination of church-officers,—the admission of persons to the communion of the church,—and the exercise of discipline, even to excommunication, according as the case may require it.

I. Independents plead, that it belongs to the church, that is, to the body of the faithful, to appoint their own officers, and, consequently, to lay them aside when they find cause for it. But the New Testament represents the power of ordination as peculiar to those who are in office. The apostles were appointed and ordained immediately by Christ himself, and were in office before a church was gathered. Other office-bearers were ordained by the apostles, such as evangelists and pastors. And in the power of ordination the apostles were suc-

ceeded by other office-bearers. Titus was left in Crete, that he might ordain elders in every city ;<sup>1</sup> and for his direction herein, the qualifications necessary are pointed out. Various directions also are given to Timothy, and not to the church in general, about this matter. He is directed to commit the things he had heard of Paul to "faithful men, who should be able to teach others also."<sup>2</sup> This must mean, committing the work of the ministry to them who were qualified for it, and able to teach ; for otherwise, he was to preach the Gospel to all men. And in this business he is enjoined to proceed with caution and careful examination, so as not to admit those who had not the necessary qualifications. "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins."<sup>3</sup> And we are not to think that the power of ordination was peculiar to the apostles and these evangelists, as having an extraordinary office ; for the rules and directions given to Timothy and Titus are for the direction of the church in all ages. Besides, where there were any ordinary elders, they were associated in ordination with the apostles, to point out that this matter belonged to them, and was to be managed by them when extraordinary office-bearers had ceased. Accordingly, we read that Timothy was ordained by a Presbytery of which Paul was a member.<sup>4</sup> And with the power of ordination is connected that of mission, which is also committed to the office-bearers, or elders of the church. To the prophets and teachers at Antioch, a call was given by the Holy Ghost to separate Paul and

<sup>1</sup> Tit. i. 5.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. v. 22.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Compare 1 Tim. iv. 14 ; 2 Tim. i. 6.

Barnabas for a ministry among the Gentiles ; and in obedience thereto, they sent them away, having fasted and prayed, and layed their hands on them.<sup>1</sup> Now, surely, it is sufficient evidence of the power of ordination and mission being peculiar to persons in office, that the directions concerning it are addressed to them, and that we are expressly told it was exercised by them ; while there is not the least mention of such a power being exercised by others, nor any direction given to others concerning it.

In opposition to this, we are referred to the admission of Matthias to be an apostle<sup>2</sup>—to the election of the deacons,<sup>3</sup>—and to the ordination of elders,<sup>4</sup>—as evidences that the power of constituting office-bearers belongs to the members of the church in general. As to the admission of Matthias to be an apostle, it will by no means prove what Independents plead for. The hundred and twenty disciples present on that occasion, were but a small proportion of the five hundred and more, who were at one time present with Christ after his resurrection.<sup>5</sup> It is not said who took part in the nomination of the two who were put upon the leet, whether it was the eleven apostles, with such of the seventy as might be present, or if it was the whole company. Besides, in this case, it is generally understood, that a reference was made to the immediate determination of God which of the two named was to be numbered with the apostles. However, admitting that all the hundred and twenty

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xiii. 1, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, vi.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, i.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, xiv. 23.



acted in this manner, it will only prove what Presbyterians plead for,—the interest that all the people have in the election of those who are to be over them in the Lord ; and the passage has been often referred to as a proof of this : but it will not prove that the people have power to appoint and constitute officers at their pleasure. What is said about the deacons proves, indeed, the free choice which the people have of those who are to bear office among them ; but it also proves, in opposition to Independents, that the judgment of their qualifications and call, and the determination about their admission to office, belong to the elders. When the multitude had chosen seven, they presented them to the apostles, by whom they were ordained, and *appointed* over that business to which they were chosen.<sup>1</sup> Independents admit that the apostles in this case exercised a power of ordination, and they seem to allow the same to their elders when they have any, but they express themselves very ambiguously about it. Though they speak of the apostles as setting these deacons apart to their office ; yet they allege not only that “ the choice was wholly committed to the people by the apostles,” but that “ the church judged on the whole matter proposed to them, and gave their approbation, before they entered on the practice of it.” Therefore, all that they can mean by the apostles setting them apart, is only that, as the mouth of the church, they prayed, and laid their hands on them, thus commending them to the Lord in the exercise of their office.

<sup>1</sup> Acts, vi. 3, 6.

And this is all they can mean by the power of ordination which they ascribe to their elders ; for they consider the people as having a power to appoint elders, even without others to set them apart : And where elders do act, it is only as declaring the judgment of the congregation, being allowed no separate judgment in the matter. But it is absurd to suppose, that praying and laying on of hands was all that the apostles had to do in this matter, or that this should be called an *appointing* of these men to the office of deacons, while it was only in consequence of the appointment that this was done. In like manner, the ordination of elders is ascribed to the apostles Paul and Barnabas, and was accompanied with prayer and fasting.<sup>1</sup> But it is asserted that this was done only by the determination of the people because the word signifies to stretch out the hand, and bears a reference to the method in which the members of the church, in general, expressed their judgment. It is always admitted by Presbyterians, that church-members have a right of choice, or consent, as to those who are constituted office-bearers among them, and that this may be signified by stretching out the hand, or by any other convenient method. But there is a difference between election and ordination, though they are often confounded by Independents ; and the ordination here mentioned is the act of the apostles, and not of the church ; for whatever be the signification of the word, the act thereby expressed is ascribed to Paul and Barnabas, and to none else. The

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xiv. 23.

primary signification of the word is, indeed, to stretch out the hand, and it was customary in the free states of Greece, for the people to choose and appoint their magistrates in that manner ; hence the word came to be used to express any appointment of persons to office, whatever might be the way in which it was done.<sup>1</sup>

It is also urged that office-bearers are the servants of the church, and that it therefore belongs to the church in general to appoint them, or to set them aside ; as all have a right to choose and dismiss their own servants. Those in office are, indeed, the servants of the church—even the apostles were so<sup>2</sup>—because for her good they exercise their ministry ; but in respect of their commission and authority, they are the servants of Christ, and it is only in his name and by his authority that they exercise their office. All the power, therefore, which belongs to others in their ordination, is only a power to try and judge whether or not they appear to have a commission and authority from Christ, and to declare accordingly. Now, Presbyterians maintain that, according to the word, the trial and judgment of this matter is committed to the elders, and not to the church at large. To sneer at them, on this account, as pleading for a “*flux of power*” through the elders, proceeds from gross misapprehension of their principles. Such an idea has no more connexion with the principles of Presbyterians about church-government than with those of Independents. Nay, it is among the latter that this “*flux of power*” takes place, if, as some of

<sup>1</sup> Acts, x. 41.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 5.



them affirm, all the power of the elders is communicated to them by the congregation.

2. Another part of the government of the church, which Independents represent as belonging to the congregation at large, is the admission of members. But Presbyterians maintain, that the judgment and determination of this matter is also committed to the office-bearers, and not to the people. The commission to teach and baptize was given to the apostles in their public character, and consequently to ordinary ministers to the end of the world.<sup>1</sup> By baptism persons were admitted members of the church; and there is no account in the New Testament that this was performed only in consequence of the judgment, or consent, of the private members, or by a vote of the congregation. Nay, by the account we have of matters there, it is evident that no such consent was sought. Three thousand were in one day added to the church, and it would be extravagant to suppose that the church in a body could have given their judgment about such a number. When Philip went to Samaria and baptized multitudes, both men and women,<sup>2</sup> we cannot suppose that he had with him what Independents call a church, that by their decision he might admit the converts to communion. At any rate, when he baptized the eunuch in the desert, it is evident there was no church by whose determination he was to proceed. Neither have we any account that the judgment of the church at Damascus was required in order to the admission of

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 19, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, viii.

Saul, though he had been a violent persecutor. Some, indeed, try to find a judgment of the church about his admission, from what is said<sup>1</sup> of his seeking to join himself to the disciples at Jerusalem, and of their hesitation about receiving him, till Barnabas removed their doubts. But this was not a question about his admission to be a member of the church; for he was already a member, and a minister too, and had acted as such in the church at Damascus. The reason of their hesitation was their ignorance of his being really a disciple, and they were afraid that he only made a pretence of it, in order to betray them. Therefore Barnabas brought him to the apostles, and informed them of the true state of matters. So that this affords not the least shadow of proof that the power of admission belongs to the church at large.

Independents, indeed, cannot deny that people were admitted to baptism by those who had warrant to dispense it, without waiting for the concurrence and consent of the church; but they contend that the converts were formed into what they call a church-state by mutual consent, or, as some choose to express it, by *mutual confederation*, and that others could be added to that formed church only by the consent of the members of which it was composed. But this involves the absurd idea that persons might be baptized and yet be members of no church; or that they might be members of the church, as their baptism evidently supposes, while yet it remained undetermined whether or not they

<sup>1</sup> Acts, ix. 26.

were to be admitted to any other privileges of membership. Such a separation of the privileges of church-fellowship, and such different terms of admission to the different parts of it, were utterly unknown in the apostolic churches. Adult persons admitted to baptism had immediate access to all parts of church-fellowship, without any further conditions required of them, or any further judgment to determine it. The three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost were thereby added to the church, and immediately entered into full communion in all church-privileges. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers."<sup>1</sup> There is not a word here of any congregational or church meeting for admitting these members, and receiving them into communion; and it would have been absurd to have had a question about it, after what had been done in admitting them to baptism. Even according to the principles of Independents, no such secondary admission by a church-meeting could have taken place with respect to them. They plead that the greater part of these converts were strangers, and not members of the church of Jerusalem, therefore the members of that church could claim no right to judge in their admission. At the same time, it is evident, there was no other church there to give them the privilege of membership. The truth is, there was

<sup>1</sup> Acts, ii. 41, 42.

no room to enter on a question about their admission, either by a congregation at Jerusalem or by any other. They were already admitted members of the church, and were entitled to all communion with other members, wherever they might have an opportunity. The catholic church is one body, having one faith and one baptism ; and all who are duly admitted members of it have a claim, unless a matter of scandal occurs, for communion with every part of the body where Providence gives them an opportunity ; and their being members of this or that congregation only depends upon their having in it, from their local situation, the best access to enjoy all the advantages of Christian fellowship.

Some may, however, plead, that even Presbyterians themselves will not, without further inquiry, admit into their communion all that are baptized, nor all whom they will acknowledge to belong to the visible church. But we are speaking here of the church as it was in the time of the apostles, and as it ought to be still, one in profession and communion, and not of its present degenerate and divided state. We cannot receive into full communion all who may have been admitted by erroneous and corrupt societies, without some further satisfaction, no more than we can admit our own members when they fall into any scandal ; but this does not say that we can consistently refuse communion to those who are already admitted into the same body, unless we can shew reason why they ought not to have been admitted. But, as the power of admission into the church and its privileges was committed by Christ

to the stewards of his house, and exercised by them, according to what is recorded in the New Testament, so the judgment of that matter, and of all questions that may arise concerning it, still belongs to the elders, and not to all the members of the church.

It is also vain to plead, as some do, that this encroaches upon, and is injurious to, the liberty of church-members, as it puts it in the power of the elders to impose whom they please upon their communion. None can have a right to plead their liberty in opposition to the institution of Christ, nor can they ever have reason to complain that it is thereby injured. In holding communion with fellow Christians, we may warrantably proceed on the testimony of others concerning them, and in most cases we must do so, as our own personal acquaintance with them cannot be very extensive. Even Independents themselves admit people to occasional communion upon the testimony of a sister church; and they may, surely, give as much credit to their own elders. Nor can church-members sustain any injury by the elders possessing and exercising the power of admission; because if there be any just objection against those whom they admit, every member of the church has a right, and is in duty bound, to represent it, in order to have the purity of communion preserved. And if, notwithstanding this, elders will persist in admitting such as are evidently scandalous, they are unworthy of their place, and ought not to be acknowledged in that or any other part of their ministry. If difficulties sometimes occur in this mode of admission, as great, if not greater difficulties will arise from



its being committed to the judgment of the whole congregation. One is no more bound to yield implicit submission to the judgment of the congregation than to that of the elders ; and if every one must concur, either the greater part must give their assent implicitly, or the person applying may be greatly injured, by being refused admission till that unanimous judgment be obtained upon full satisfaction to all the members.

3. Intimately connected with the question about the power of admission, is that concerning the power of discipline, and the same reasoning will, in a great measure, apply to it ; but as this point has been more keenly controverted, it is necessary to enter into a fuller consideration of it. By the discipline of the church, we are to understand all that censure which ought to be inflicted on church-members when in a state of offence, according to the degree of it, extending even the length of excommunication in the case of every aggravated scandal, or of obstinacy in lesser offences. Concerning this discipline, Independents plead that the power of it is committed to the members of the church in general, or at least, that it is not to be exercised but according to their determination, or explicit consent, and in their presence in the church-meeting. Presbyterians, on the other hand, maintain that the formal exercise of discipline, as instituted by Christ, is committed to the elders or rulers, and not to all the members of the church. They admit that it is the duty of all church-members, in a private way, to exhort and admonish one another ; and, in the case of private offences, it is the duty of every member, as he has op-

portunity, to reprove or rebuke his brother ;<sup>1</sup> but they insist that the judgment and censure of matters of public scandal is committed to the eldership. Now, considering that this is such a principal part of the government of the church, one would think that we must immediately conclude that it belongs only to those who are called rulers and governors, unless there be very clear evidence to the contrary. But, besides this, we find that this part of the government of the church is expressly committed to the office-bearers, and is to be exercised by them.

In confirmation of this, we may refer to the directions given to Timothy and Titus, with respect to the exercise of discipline. In these directions it is plainly pointed out as a part of their ministry in the church, and peculiarly connected with their office. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."<sup>2</sup> "Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine."<sup>3</sup> "Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."<sup>4</sup> "These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority."<sup>5</sup> "A man who is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject."<sup>6</sup> It is already admitted, that there is a duty of private admonition and reproof incumbent on all Christians by the law of love ; but it is plain that what is here mentioned was incumbent on them by virtue of their office, and as

<sup>1</sup> Luke, xvii. 3.<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 2.<sup>5</sup> Tit. ii. 15.<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. v. 19, 20.<sup>4</sup> Tit. i. 13.<sup>6</sup> Tit. iii. 10.

much so as the preaching of the Gospel. Nor is it only a mere doctrinal reproving of sin which is here intended, but an exercise of discipline and church censure upon particular persons, even the length of rejection, or excommunication, where the case requires it. The pretence that the same thing is enjoined upon all church-members, and not upon office-bearers only, shall be afterwards examined.

But further to ascertain this point, it is necessary to go to the institution of the discipline of the church, and see to whom it was committed. It is recorded by the apostle John. “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you : as my Father hath sent me, even so I send you. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”<sup>1</sup> Now, for determining the import of these words, the following things may be observed, 1. That the remission and retaining of sin here mentioned, is something that belonged to the apostles in their public character, and that they were empowered for it, by Christ’s *sending* them, and *giving* them a *commission*, in virtue of the authority he had from the Father. 2. It refers to something that was to be of standing use in the church to the end of the world ; as this is plainly an additional account of that commission recorded by Matthew ;<sup>2</sup> and there is no reason to suppose that it refers to any thing of a miraculous nature, so as to be peculiar to the times of the apostles. 3. It is the exercise of the government and discipline of the church,

<sup>1</sup> John, xx. 21, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Matth. xxviii. 19, 20.



principally, if not solely, that is intended by the expressions, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained."<sup>1</sup> Some contend that these words refer to the power of working miracles and healing diseases, because "our Lord declares this to be a proof of authority to forgive sin on earth."<sup>2</sup> The Son of man had, indeed, power on earth, even in his lowest state of humiliation, to forgive sins, and the miracles he wrought were a proof of all the power he claimed; but the apostles never had a power of forgiving sin as Christ had; and the miracles which they wrought were never designed to be a proof of a power which they never had, and never claimed. Besides, in the passage referred to, Christ is giving the reason, not for his working the miracle, but for his using an expression at which the Jews were so offended. It was, that they might know he had power not only to work the miracle, but also to forgive sin. Others apply what is here said about the remission and the retaining of sin, to the ministry of the word, and consider it as intimating an authority to pronounce a sentence of pardon or condemnation, according as persons shall give entertainment to the gospel, or be found rejecters of it. No doubt, pardon is exhibited to sinners in the testimony and promise of the Gospel; and, as it is applied by faith, all who believe are in a state of pardon, and all who believe not remain in a state of condemnation. It is also true, that the public ministry of the word is committed

<sup>1</sup> John, xx. 23.<sup>2</sup> Matth. ix. 6.

to certain persons in office, and they are to declare all the counsel of God. But, besides that it seems strange to represent the condemnation of sinners, as a part of the ministry of the Gospel, it cannot be admitted that a power of pardon or absolution, in respect of men's state before God, is competent to any creature. Ministers are to declare unto men the word of God in the Gospel concerning that matter; but, as they cannot certainly know the state of individuals, they have no warrant to pronounce any thing concerning it. So far then as this power of remitting or retaining sin is applied to individuals, it can only respect the exercise of discipline. It cannot apply to the pardon or condemnation of a sinner, in reference to his state before God: It can only refer to a judgment about sin as it is scandal, and as it affects a person's privileges in the church-state. A power of pronouncing persons in a state of scandal, and of absolving them from it, in a due exercise of discipline, is all that is competent to man; and this power is here committed to persons in office, the stewards in Christ's house, and is to be exercised in *binding* and *loosing*, as the matter is elsewhere expressed.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Independents keenly contend that the power of binding and loosing, or, in other words, the power of discipline, is committed to the whole church, that is, as they explain it, to the congregation of believers, and not to persons in office, otherwise than as they are a part of that church, and act as moderators in the management of that business.

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xvi. 19; xviii. 18.

In support of this sentiment, they urge several things from the texts in Matthew above mentioned, particularly from the following passage. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican. Only I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>1</sup> To enter into an examination of all that has been urged from this passage, on both sides of the controversy, would enlarge this treatise far beyond the bounds proposed, and would tend more to embarrass the reader than anything else. Our Lord is here giving direction about the removing of offences, in which there is said to be a procedure from one step to another, according as shall be found necessary ; and it would be greatly conducive to the interests of religion, if the rule laid down were carefully and conscientiously observed. First, the of-

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 15—20.

fending brother is to be told and dealt with about his offence, by himself alone ; and if that do not succeed, the next step is to take one or two more, and in their presence, and with their assistance, to deal further with him. If he still prove obstinate after all reasonable pains in dealing with him privately, then it is to be told to the church,<sup>1</sup> and if he will not hear the church, he is to be held as “a heathen man and a publican.” In the three following verses, assurance is given, that the Lord Christ will ratify the judgment of the church in the due exercise of discipline.

Now, Independents contend, that the church here means a congregation, of which the offending and the reproving brothers are members, because it is to it they both have access, and it is to the power of it only that they are subject ; that to the members of this congregation, convened in a church-meeting, the matter is to be delated ; and that by them, along with their elders, judgment is to be given, and the offender cast out, if he prove obstinate. But such a view of the passage cannot be admitted. It limits our Lord’s direction to the case of the parties being members of the same congregation ; whereas, it may frequently happen that the parties belong to different congregations, and to such a case also the direction must be considered as applicable. It also proceeds upon the supposition, that always by *a church*, we are to understand a single congregation ; whereas the word, as has been already shewn, is very seldom taken in that sense in the New Testament.

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 17.

When it is mentioned indefinitely, as here, it means the one universal church ; though common sense will readily suggest that our telling the matter of offence can only be to that part of it to which we have access, and to which the cognizance of the matter properly belongs. Further, the Independent view of this passage proceeds upon the erroneous supposition, that by the church we must understand only, or at least principally, the private members of it in contradistinction from the elders ; so that when any thing is said to be done by the church, it must necessarily include their agency. We do not say that the word *church*, taken by itself, means the elders exclusively, no more than we can admit that it means the people exclusively ; but the general term which comprehends both is frequently used, while the application of it is to be restricted, or extended, as the case requires. Therefore, from the use of the term *church*, we cannot determine, one way or other, to whom the judgment of this matter is referred ; but when we know from other places of Scripture, that the exercise of discipline is committed to the elders, and that many cases occur where, in the way of a judgment by the people, this direction would be impracticable—as for example, when different, yea, many congregations are concerned—we may be satisfied that it is a reference of the case to elders of the church, and a judgment of it by them that is here intended. And, even in this case, there is a great propriety in using the term *church*, because, in the reference here mentioned, the matter is brought to that judgment which Christ has appointed in his church : And a person



may be properly said to refuse to "hear the church," when he will not submit to the exercise of that authority and government which Christ has instituted in it, although it be not exercised by all, nor even by the generality of the members.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The author's views of this passage have been maintained, and, to every unprejudiced mind, satisfactorily proved, not only by the most learned and esteemed theologians of our own country, both ancient and modern, such as, Rutherford, Gillespie, Wood, Anderson, Brown, and Dick, but also by a host of celebrated writers in other countries, and from the earliest times. We refer to Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Cyprian, Calvin, Beza, Pareus, Chemnitius, Aretius, Erasmus, Polanus, Musculus, Piscator, Bucanus, Rivetus, Marloratus, Bucer, Vitringa, Cartwright, and even Parker and Goodwin among the Independents. Those who wish to satisfy themselves more fully on this point, may consult Gillespie's *Aaron's Rod*, Rutherford's *Due Right of Presbytery*, and his *Peaceable Plea for Paul's Presbytery*, and Dr Brown's (of Langton) admirable little work, entitled "*A Vindication of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government, as proposed in the Standards of the Church of Scotland.*"

The following is the judicious statement on this subject of the late Dr Dick, Professor of Theology to the United Associate Synod. "Let it be observed," says he, "that when these words (Matth. xviii. 15, 17) were spoken, the Christian Church was not founded; and that, consequently, they would have been unintelligible to the disciples, unless they had alluded to some mode of proceeding with which they were acquainted. Now, I think that no dispassionate person can doubt that the allusion is to the Jewish Synagogue, the constitution of which bore a close resemblance to that of a Presbyterian congregation. It was composed of two classes of persons,—the people, who met together to hear the law read and expounded, and the rulers, who presided over this assembly. The latter are frequently mentioned in the New Testament; and we learn from the writings of the Jews, that their office consisted in teaching and governing, and that the government comprehended the regulation of all the ordinary proceedings of the Synagogue, the care of the poor, and the judging and excommunicating of offenders. 'Tell it,' says Christ, 'to the church,' in the same way in which such cases were told to the Synagogue; that is, bring it before the rulers of the church, that they may deal with the obstinate brother, and expel him if he will not submit. If our

But it is urged,—that the *binding* and *loosing* mentioned,<sup>1</sup> is competent to all the members of the church, and not to elders only, because Christ promises, for their encouragement, that “if any two of them shall agree on earth, touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them;”<sup>2</sup> and that he will be present “where two or three of them are gathered together in his name.”<sup>3</sup> How extravagant is such reasoning! Because two or three may concur in supplication to God, or meet in Christ’s name about any warranted duty, may they assume to themselves the discipline of the church, and proceed to excommunication? If any two or three who may pray together, may proceed to this also, what need is there for the direction, “Tell the church?” Must we conclude that, because a promise is applied to one case, therefore all cases to which it is applicable are the same? When Christ gave commission to his apostles to preach and baptize, encouraging them with the promise of his presence, how absurd would it be to conclude, that all Christians have a right to preach and baptize, because they also have the promise of Christ’s presence! Because there is a promise of a gracious answer to the

Lord intended to give a rule for the future conduct of his disciples when his church should be established, he plainly signified that the mode of treating offenders should be taken from the model of the Synagogue; and his words, instead of favouring the Independent notion, that the people are the depositaries of power, import that it is vested in the rulers alone, and that to them exclusively the government belongs. Thus, the passage is in unison with those from which it has appeared, that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were granted to the apostles, and their successors in the care of the church.”—Dick’s Lect. on Theol. vol. iv. pp. 356, 357.—ED.

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 18.<sup>2</sup> Matth. xviii. 19.<sup>3</sup> Matth. xviii. 20.

prayer of faith, may this be considered as a warrant for every thing? Or, because there is an assurance of Christ's presence to those who are met in his name, may we assume his name where it is not given, and expect his presence in that for which we have not his warrant and authority? The Lord Christ here gives his warrant for very important procedure in his church, and those who act according to it have the promise of his presence, whether they be many or few; but what proof is this that all have a warrant to exercise the power here mentioned?

Another passage, recorded by the same evangelist,<sup>1</sup> has also been a subject of great discussion in this controversy, particularly the words, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." By the binding and loosing on earth here ascribed to Peter, it is agreed on both sides that we are to understand the exercise of government and discipline in the church, and by the *keys* of the kingdom of heaven, are meant that power and authority for this, of which the keys are an emblem. But the question is, To whom are these keys given, and by whom are they to be used in the government and discipline of the church? The Papists, to support the supremacy which has been claimed by the Bishop of Rome, as the successor of Peter, affirm that they were given to Peter alone, as the prince of the apostles; but it is needless

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xvi. 16, 19.



to take up time in exposing the futility of this imagination. Presbyterians maintain, that they were given to Peter, as an apostle and elder, and, therefore, that the gift extends to all the apostles, and after them, to all ordinary elders to the end of time. The keys are given to the stewards of the house or family, that, according to the will of the Lord of the family, and the rules which he has prescribed, they may admit or exclude, exercise the necessary government, and give every one his portion of meat in due season. The Lord Christ is said to "have the keys of hell and of death,"<sup>1</sup> and the key of the house of David,"<sup>2</sup> as expressive of his supreme authority, and the government which he exercises in relation to these things mentioned; but the keys of the kingdom of heaven here spoken of, intimate a ministerial power; in other words, they signify that authority which office-bearers in the church receive from Christ for the exercise of their office, particularly in government and discipline. And this passage, as well as many others, contains a clear proof that such a power is given to *office-bearers*, and not to all the members of the church.

Independents, however, contend, that the keys are given, and, by them, the power of binding and loosing, to the whole church, and not to the elders only. They plead, that it is to the church built upon the rock, and as including all believers, that Christ gives the keys; and that Peter is here spoken to as one of these, and not as a person in office. We answer, Christ, indeed, declares the security of his church as built upon the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. i. 18,

<sup>2</sup> Rev. iii. 7.

rock, and he also speaks of that external ministry which he authorizes and blesses for its edification ; but this is no intimation that this ministry is committed to all who enjoy the benefit of it, and who partake of the security here mentioned : Nay, the contrary is clearly intimated ; for Christ does not say, “ I will give unto this *church*,” but (addressing Peter) “ I will give unto *thee* the keys.” Nor can it be admitted that Peter is here addressed as a believer, and consequently, that the grant is made to all believers, for in that case, none but believers could have a right to the keys, and all believers, either jointly or separately, would have a right to bind and loose, and exercise government in the church, not only women, but even those who may be in a state of scandal. But, say some, it is not faith abstractly, but as professed, which gives a right to the keys, and it was on account of the eminent profession of faith which Peter made that the keys were given. It was, indeed, on occasion of this eminent profession, that the power of the keys was intimated to Peter ; but will this prove a right to the keys in every one who makes a similar profession ? It was on occasion of a profession which Peter made of his love to Christ, that he said unto him, “ Feed my sheep.”<sup>1</sup> May we therefore conclude with a certain preacher, “ that every man who can lay his hand on his heart and say he loves Christ, has Christ’s call and warrant to go and preach the Gospel ?” The only thing further that deserves notice on this point, is a pretty conceit of some,

<sup>1</sup> John, xxi. 17.

dressed up in the form of an argument, to prove that the power of the keys belongs to all the members of the church. “The church itself (without the elders, no doubt) is the spouse, the bride of Jesus Christ. Now, to whom should the keys of the house be committed but to the bride?” A shrewd thought! The mistress of the family has a right to the keys, and, where there is no steward, takes the management of them; but if all the members of the church are both mistress and steward, who are the rest of the family, to whom they may stand in these relations?

We shall now proceed to consider some other passages to which Independents refer in support of the people’s claim to the power of the keys, and the exercise of government. Some refer to the eleventh chapter of the Acts,<sup>1</sup> which contains the account that Peter gave of his conduct, for the satisfaction of those who were offended at his baptizing Cornelius, and holding communion with the uncircumcised. But, surely, this does not afford a shadow of proof. We are not told who were the complainers; but though we were, we must not suppose that all the complainers were judges. And what Presbyterian will deny that the elders ought to give the people all the information and satisfaction they can require, about any part of their conduct in the ministry? But who can imagine that their doing so is an acknowledgment that the people have the power of government, and a right to inflict censure if they obtain not satisfaction?

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xi. 1—18.

Others refer to Paul's interview with the apostle James, and the elders of Jerusalem, recorded in the twenty-first chapter of the Acts, and particularly to the following words, "What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come."<sup>2</sup> But this is a case of the same kind as the preceding, and admits of much the same answer. A false report had been spread concerning Paul, and had reached Jerusalem, that he had taught all the Jews of the dispersion, "to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." When Paul came up to Jerusalem, James and the elders informed him of this, and that the multitude of the Jews who were all zealous of the law, were greatly dissatisfied, and would not fail to come together about the matter, now that they heard he was come. James and all the elders, therefore, directed him to a certain observance of the law, in order to convince the people of the falsehood of that report. And, for aught that appears, it answered the end; at least, there was no convention of the people about that business.

The only shadow of an argument is taken from these words of James and the elders, "The multitude must needs come together." From this it is argued, "that the people, or multitude, have, along with their office-bearers, a power of judging, and a right to be satisfied, not only in the case of fellow church-members, but of their office-bearers; for there is no other reason as-

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xxi. 22.

signed for their coming together, but to give their judgment as a church, and to be satisfied in every circumstance, as in the case of Paul." No doubt, if the multitude were dissatisfied, it is natural to think they would take measures to obtain satisfaction, and it was their duty to do so. It is also likely, that, in this case, a very numerous body would gather about the apostles and elders for that purpose. It is also true that, in order to their satisfaction, it behoved them to exercise their judgment regarding the information that might be given them on the subject. But how can it be said that "there is no other reason assigned for their coming together, but to give their judgment as a church?" Such a reason is neither mentioned nor insinuated. Besides, it may be asked, How, upon the principles of Independents, could the multitude of the Jerusalem-church presume to exercise judgment upon Paul, who was none of their members? And if they had, along with their office-bearers, a right of judging, How was it fair in James and the elders to prevent them, and to engross the judgment of this cause to themselves, before the multitude could convene?

The account that we have in the same book of the decision of the controversy about the obligation of the Mosaic law upon the Gentile converts will require a larger consideration.<sup>1</sup> Presbyterians appeal to it as a proof that the power of determining, ministerially, controversies in matters of faith, belongs to the office-bearers of the church. And they have good reason to

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv.



do so. Certain men who came from Judea to the church at Antioch, insisted that the Gentile converts should be circumcised, and obliged to observe the law of Moses, in opposition to all that Paul and Barnabas could say to the contrary. It was therefore determined, that they two, and certain others with them, should go to Jerusalem, "unto the apostles and elders," about this question.<sup>1</sup> When they arrived, "the apostles and elders came together to consider of this question."<sup>2</sup> And the decision which they gave is called "the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem."<sup>3</sup> Thus it appears that the reference was made to the *apostles* and *elders*; that *they* met to consider of it, and that *they* made a decree concerning it. One would think this pretty good evidence that, in these times, a judgment of this kind was considered as the peculiar province of the office-bearers of the church; and the proof would need to be very plain and express that would oblige us to think the contrary.

Independents, however, insist that, on this occasion, all the people, or at least the generality of the private members of the church of Jerusalem, convened with the apostles and elders, and took part with them in the discussion and decision of this controversy. For proof of this they refer to the words, "all the multitude," "the whole church," and "the brethren,"<sup>4</sup> as well as the apostles and elders. Before proceeding to a particular examination of this proof, it may be

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, xvi. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, xvi. 12, 22, 23.

proper to observe in general, that it is not very consistent with the principles of our opponents to suppose, that all, or even the majority of the private church-members, took part in this business ; and, though it were true, it would, according to their principles, prove nothing on this point. When this passage is urged as an example to prove the power of a Synod, they contend, that the reference was made to *inspired apostles* ; that *as such* they gave a decision, and that *they only* could say, “ it seemed good to the Holy Ghost.” How then can they suppose that *the people* would presume to interfere in the business ? Will they pretend, that “ all the elders,” and “ all the multitude” of the church at Jerusalem, were inspired, as well as the apostles ? Again, though they could prove that these expressions refer to “ all the multitude” of private members in that church, yet it would prove nothing on this point. They insist that there was nothing here but a simple advice, applied for, and given ; but, because private church-members may give an advice in any matter according to the best of their judgment, will that prove that they may assume the government of the church, a power to judge of and determine controversies of faith, and lay down rules of church-communion ? Further, Independents themselves must restrict these universal terms, “ all the multitude,” and “ the whole church,” so as to leave out a great part, if not the majority, of the private members of the church. They will not *all* deny children to be church-members, but they cannot suppose that they are here included ; and as to women, we may suppose the prohibition of their speaking in the church was



as much in force at Jerusalem as at Corinth. Now, if these universal terms must be restricted to the men, and to such of them as could attend on that occasion ; why should we not extend the limitation as far as the nature of the subject and other scriptures require ?

But let us come to particulars. It is said, “ Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”<sup>1</sup> Now, here three things are taken for granted by Independents, not one of which can be proved, viz., 1. That “ the multitude ” mentioned is the multitude of the private members of the church ; 2. That they had been speaking ; and, 3. That they spake as judges in this cause, equally with the apostles and elders. Supposing, as they allege, that this refers to “ all the multitude of the church ” of Jerusalem, it would prove nothing against Presbyterians, who, in full consistency with their principles about church-courts, admit others to speak besides members. Parties must be heard ; and in a public cause any members of the church may state their sentiments, their difficulties, or objections ; they may reason, and remonstrate, yet still, the decision of the cause lies with the office-bearers, the members of the judicatory. There had been, no doubt, a good deal of speaking, though the expression, “ all the multitude kept silence,”<sup>1</sup> does not necessarily imply it, much less, that *all* the multitude had been previously speaking. Peter had spoken, and there had been much disputing

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv. 12.

before that,<sup>1</sup> probably with those mentioned in the fifth verse, who, before the Synod met, insisted in favour of the obligation of the law upon the Gentiles, and who, it may be, disputed for a time in the Synod to the same effect. But we are not told who these disputants were, any further than that they had been of the sect of the Pharisees. Whether they were in a public or in a private character ; whether they were members of the church at Jerusalem, or had come up from Antioch to plead their cause, we are not told ; neither is it of any consequence in this controversy. But whether “ all the multitude who kept silence ” had or had not been previously speaking, we cannot suppose that this means all the multitude of the church at Jerusalem, who could not possibly be all either speakers or hearers at that meeting. It can only mean all the multitude who were then present, but of whom they were composed we are not particularly informed. The Jewish council is called a multitude,<sup>2</sup> and probably was not more numerous in members than this Synod.

Neither is there any more proof in what is afterwards said.—“ Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas.”<sup>3</sup> These words may be considered as referring to the decision of the cause, as well as to the agreement of sending commissioners ; but by the *whole church* we cannot understand the whole church in Jerusalem, whose many thousands (literally myriads) could not convene about

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xxiii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, xv. 22.

this business ; it only means the *assembly* here met. The word *church* sometimes signifies a particular assembly.<sup>1</sup> And here it is that assembly of apostles and elders who came together to consider of this matter ;<sup>2</sup> and the expression, “ with the *whole church*,” intimates only the unanimity of the decision. Or, if any shall insist that the expression refers to some others besides the apostles and elders, it may be applied to the *brethren* mentioned in a subsequent verse. “ The apostles and elders, and brethren, send greeting unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles,”<sup>3</sup> &c. And we are not under a necessity of concluding that these brethren were some private members of the church.—For, besides the apostles and ordinary elders who made up the principal part of the meeting, there were other office-bearers, prophets and evangelists, such as Judas and Silas ;<sup>4</sup> and Titus.<sup>5</sup> There is a brotherhood that belongs to all the members of the church, and on account of which the name brethren will apply to all ; but from this brotherhood those are not excluded who are in office, therefore they also may be called brethren ; and more especially, as there is also a brotherhood of office, as an additional reason of the appellation : And there is ground to believe that the brethren here joined with the apostles and elders, are so called in reference, especially, to their brotherhood in office ; for they were these brethren among whom Judas and Silas, two prophets, were chief men.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xix. 39, 41 ; 1 Cor. xiv. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Acts, xv. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Acts, xv. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Galat. ii. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Acts, xv. 22.

Another argument frequently insisted on to prove that the power of government and discipline belongs to the congregation at large, and not to the elders only, is taken from the excommunication of the incestuous Corinthian, about which the apostle gives the following direction :—‘ For I, verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, him that hath so done this deed ; In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.’<sup>1</sup> Now, it is argued,—that this epistle is not directed to the elders or persons in office, but to “ the church of God at Corinth, to them who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ;” and in this chapter the apostle addresses them in the same general way, without any intimation that this business was restricted to some of them. But, as has been observed in a former instance, Independents themselves must make a restriction here. They will not pretend that the women were to exercise authority over the man in this instance ; yet they certainly include them among the saints, and consider them as a part of the church which is here addressed. If they say that it is not competent to them, because it appears from other scriptures that they are prohibited : Then we say, it appears from other scriptures that the power of discipline is committed to persons in office ; and there is no mention of its being committed to others, which silence in the institutions of Christ, amounts

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 3, 4, 5.

to a prohibition. And we have as good right as our opponents to consider this matter restricted to them to whom it is competent. It is a weak argument that, because the epistle is directed to the church in general, therefore every thing in it must apply to all the members of the church, unless a restriction be particularly mentioned. When, in this very epistle, directions about prophecy are addressed to the church in general, must we conclude, that all the members were prophets? Or, when it is said, "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn,"<sup>1</sup> are we to imagine that all who might learn, should also prophesy? And when they are reproved in general, as in the eleventh chapter, for a disorderly administration and participation of the Lord's Supper, must we conclude, that it was the duty of private members to dispense that ordinance, as well as to partake of it? Or, must we suppose, that the people only were to blame for their irregularity in receiving, and not the ministers for their irregularity in dispensing it, while yet this was the cause of the other.

But, it is urged, that the apostle in the fifth chapter evidently addresses all the church; he reproves them for not mourning; and he says, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."<sup>2</sup> No doubt the address is general; for one way or other they were generally to blame. It was the duty of all to mourn, though it was not the duty of all to assume the power of discipline: And there was in this matter something to be done which was competent to all. There are three things belonging to it, each of which admits of a

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 31.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. v. 13.



distinct consideration. First, the judgment, whether or not the offender was to be excommunicated. Now, as to this, it cannot be admitted that it was practicable, for all the members of that numerous church to meet and deliberate about it; and although it had been practicable, it cannot be granted that the matter was open to their deliberation, after the apostle had already judged that he should be cast out. Secondly, another thing belonging to this business is the open, solemn declaration of the sentence, for the information of the world, the direction of the church, and the humiliation of the offender: and this seems to be what is principally intended.<sup>1</sup> Now, it is evident this cannot be the act of all; and Independents acknowledge that it is the proper business of the elders. Thirdly, there is something incumbent on all the members of the church, namely, to conduct themselves in reference to the offender as that sentence requires,—to withdraw from communion with him, and to have no familiar intercourse with him that he may be ashamed. This also serves to explain what is said about this matter in the second chapter of the second epistle. At the sixth verse of that chapter, it is called a punishment or rebuke by *many*—“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many;”<sup>2</sup> and waving other things that might be observed, it was, indeed, in the manner just now explained, inflicted by many. And a sore punishment it was to be thus excluded from the communion of the church, and to be shunned by

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 4.<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 6, 11.

those whose society is precious ; but it was blessed of God for his humiliation and repentance ; so that the apostle directs them to forgive and restore him, and exhorts all of them to confirm their love to him, which Presbyterians also do in like cases.

A like answer might be given to the argument which some urge from the directions, “ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother who walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us :” “ And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”<sup>1</sup> These directions how to act towards scandalous persons, are addressed to the church in general. Something included in them is competent to all ; but that does not say that every thing is so. And many directions may have a very particular and limited application, though they be generally expressed. The following is an instance—“ I charge you by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.”<sup>2</sup> Can common sense admit the thought, that the apostle charges all the holy brethren to cause the epistle to be read unto all the holy brethren ? Is it not evident that this was the special charge of some, and probably that the charge was laid upon the elders ? And if so, is not this an instance that they are particularly meant, where they are not expressly mentioned ? To notice, in this controversy,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. v. 27.



the direction, "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it,"<sup>1</sup> might be reckoned an affront to our opponents, if it were not expressly pleaded by some of the most eminent of them. If we should say, that it was especially incumbent on the other elders, to whom also the directions in the two preceding verses seem to apply, to deal with their brother about the faithful exercise of his ministry, our opponents cannot deny it. If we admit that it is the duty of every church-member, who has ability for it, to exhort and excite his minister to the diligent discharge of his office, what will they make of it? If they shall say, the people are warranted to call their elders before them in a church-meeting, and try and censure them according to their delinquency, they must bring better proof than they have yet done before they establish their point.

### PART III.

#### OF THE NATURE, POWER, AND SUBORDINATION OF CHURCH-COURTS.

CHURCH-COURTS! No sooner are they named, than we may expect to hear from many, keen invectives against clerical power, despotic authority, lordly domination, encroachment on Christian liberty, and other topics of declamation, as if the connexion was

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 17.

necessary and certain. While it is boldly asserted that they have no warrant in Scripture, the very name is made a subject of banter, and their forms of procedure, however useful, are held up to derision ; but, in many cases, it is found convenient to supply by reproach or ridicule, the want of reason and argument. No doubt, the name and authority of church-courts have often been assumed by those who had no right to assume them, and they have often been abused to the most hurtful and unworthy purposes. But what ordinance has not been perverted and profaned ? Must the ordinance of preaching be given up because some, under cover of it, have propagated “damnable heresies ?” Or, must all church-government and discipline be set aside, because, both among Independents and Presbyterians, there have been instances of tyrannical administration ? To determine the warrantableness of church-courts, we must not judge by the irregular managements of men, but examine what is the Scripture-institution.

It has been already proved, that the government of the church is committed to the elders, and, according to example, recorded in the New Testament as our rule, it is, in the principal parts of it, to be exercised by them, not separately, but in the way of association, in smaller or greater numbers, as the case may require, and circumstances will permit. Notwithstanding the extraordinary powers wherewith the apostles were invested, they never acted singly when they could associate ; yea, when there were any of them present, they joined with ordinary elders in acts of government. The apostles

associated in ordaining the deacons,<sup>1</sup> and in sending Peter and John to Samaria.<sup>2</sup> Paul and Barnabas were missioned by a meeting of prophets and teachers at Antioch,<sup>3</sup> and they two acted together in the ordination of elders.<sup>4</sup> And not by Paul alone, but by a presbytery, was Timothy ordained.<sup>5</sup> James and the elders of Jerusalem, in a meeting by themselves, gave direction to Paul about removing a scandal which had arisen from a false report concerning him.<sup>6</sup> And there was a large meeting of apostles and elders, to determine a controversy about the freedom of the Gentile converts from the obligation of the law of Moses.<sup>7</sup> These, and other instances that might be adduced, point out, that, in the government of the church, and in the exercise of discipline, the elders are to associate together.

Now, these meetings of the elders for the government of the church, may, without offence, be called courts, as the term is convenient to express the subject, provided no improper idea be affixed to it. Although they be not in all respects the same as civil courts, there may be such a similarity as to justify the designation. The church is called a kingdom although it be not of the same nature with the kingdoms of this world; and the meetings of the rulers for the administration of its laws and ordinances, may be called courts, without supposing that they are of a civil nature, or that they possess any power injurious to the sovereignty

<sup>1</sup> Acts, vi.<sup>3</sup> Acts, xiii. 1, 3.<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 14.<sup>2</sup> Acts, viii. 14.<sup>4</sup> Acts, xiv. 23.<sup>6</sup> Acts, xxi. 18—25<sup>7</sup> Acts, xv.

of Christ, to the spirituality of his kingdom, or to the liberty of his subjects. Even, as in many civil courts, there is no power of legislation, but all their power and administration, with the penalties which they inflict, are determined and bounded by law ; so it is here. A power of legislation in the church of Christ, or dominion over the conscience, is not competent to any on earth ; all that is pleaded for is only a ministerial power to declare and apply the laws of Christ. Nor do Presbyterians claim any other power for these judicatories than is claimed by Independents on behalf of their congregational or church meetings. If it be a despotism for a meeting of elders to determine a controversy about doctrine, to censure a disorderly practice, or to reject an unworthy member ; what is it when these church-meetings take upon them to do the same ? “ Therefore they shall be” their “ judges.”

In consequence of this warrant for church-courts, their decisions, so far as agreeable to the word, are obligatory on the conscience, and are entitled to a submission in the Lord. They can have no obligation independent of the word, much less contrary to it ; but, “ if consonant to the word,” they “ are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the word, but also by the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his word.”<sup>1</sup> There is a great difference between the injunction of a parent to a child, and the advice of a child to a parent, though

<sup>1</sup> West. Confess. Ch. xxxi. Sect 3.

both were supposed equally agreeable to the word, for there is an authority in the former that is to be acknowledged and respected; and this is also an acknowledgment of the law of God, which gives parents that authority. In like manner, an acknowledgment of, and submission to, the authority of church judicatories is not a renouncing the authority of Christ, who hath appointed them, but is a necessary part of our subjection to him. It is not the authority, the excellency, the wisdom or holiness of men, that can lay an obligation on the conscience in these matters: It is the authority of Christ in his own institution. Accordingly, the decision of every eldership, and of every presbytery or synod, having Christ's call, and acting in conformity to his word, has the same obligation, whether their number be few or many. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, every two or three elders, or even a greater number, are not to consider themselves so independent in their administrations, as to refuse accountableness to others, or to decline an association with them when it is practicable, and when the nature of the cause may require their joint deliberation and judgment. The elders of a particular congregation are to consider themselves subordinate to those of the neighbouring congregations, and these again to a larger body; which subordination is to be followed out as far as it is found practicable, and can suit the ends of edi-

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 20.

fication. This is not the subordination of one church to another, which Independents justly condemn ; nor is it a subjecting the greater part of elders to the government of a few, as takes place among the Episcopalians, and which is equally contrary to the word : But it is the subordination of a part to the whole, or of the lesser number to the greater, of which it is a part ; just as among Independents, a part of the congregation is considered in subordination to the whole. It does not prevent a smaller number of elders from proceeding in all the exercise of government which that part of the flock with which they are particularly connected calls for ; at the same time, it leaves room for the judgment of a greater number in matters of general concern or peculiar difficulty, and in cases of mal-administration. Nor is it essential that the meetings of these various judicatories, superior and inferior, should be all stated and fixed, although, when the business requires, and circumstances admit of frequent meetings, it may be of advantage to have them previously agreed upon and fixed, so as all concerned may have due advertisement of the time and place. But whether their meetings be stated or occasional, it is warrantable for presbyteries, synods, and councils, to extend their care to every part of the body with which they are connected, and to exercise government and discipline, as there may be occasion ; though the power that is given them, being only for edification, cannot warrant their assuming a judgment in causes about which they cannot have due information, or where it would be prejudicial to any concerned.



In opposition to this, Independents not only contend, as we have seen, that the government of the church belongs to the people, and cannot be exercised without their consent, but they also maintain that every congregation is, in that matter, absolutely independent on all other churches ; so that whatever information about their procedure they may see meet to give for the satisfaction of sister-churches, yet none have a right to reverse their decisions, nor to inflict censure upon any of their members. Some of them allow of associations of synods or councils, composed of the elders and messengers of different churches, to consult about matters of general concern, and to give advice in such cases as may be referred to them for that purpose ; but they refuse that they can do any more than give advice, or that they have power to exercise discipline upon any, with whatever scandal in principle or practice they may be chargeable. In answer to this, let it be observed,

1. That the *unity* of the church argues that it is warrantable for the elders of the church to meet for the exercise of government, in presbyteries, synods, and councils, as it shall be found necessary and practicable. The church of Christ is one body. “ There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.”<sup>1</sup> And this union does not respect merely the invisible state of the church, and the spiritual privileges which belong to it ; but it has a respect also to its external and visible

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 4, 5.



state, with the ordinances, in the observation of which external and visible communion is kept up : for to this one body the ordinances and office-bearers are given.<sup>1</sup> The elders, therefore, stand in a relation to the whole visible church, and are to exercise their ministry towards it as far as they have opportunity, and as far as it can promote the edification of the body. It is, no doubt, highly necessary and proper that they have a stated and fixed charge of such a particular part of the body as they can ordinarily administer to, and with which they must be particularly acquainted, in order to a more profitable exercise of their ministry. Ministers of the word are not in the way of making much improvement when running up and down : neither are frequent changes profitable to the people. They may, indeed, by that means be amused, but they are not so readily edified as by the stated ministry even of those of inferior talents. But though it be proper that the office-bearers of the church have a particular charge in which their labours are to be ordinarily employed, that does not prevent their having a relation to the whole church, nor the exercise of their ministry towards any part of it, according as they shall have opportunity. A pastor is not so connected with one congregation as to prevent his being employed, occasionally, in dispensing the word and sacraments to another ; and we cannot suppose that he is more restrained in the exercise of government than in the ministry of other ordinances. Yea, the elders, on account of this relation in which

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 7, 11, 12, 13 ; 1 Cor. xii. 28.

they stand to the catholic church, are in duty bound to concur with their brethren in other congregations, in the oversight of all to whom they have access, as far as it does not interfere with the duties of their more particular charge.

Upon the same principles, it is the duty of church-members to acknowledge and submit to other elders, besides those who belong to their own congregation, under whose more immediate inspection they are. The division of the church into separate and distinct congregations, for a more advantageous enjoyment of the ordinances, should not prevent communion with the whole body in any particular in which it is attainable. When, on account of the increase of number, it may become necessary to divide any particular church into two or more congregations, the members of these several congregations are, nevertheless, to hold communion together as far as they have opportunity, and as far as they can, consistent with the duty they owe to that part of the body with which they are now particularly connected. They are still, as they have opportunity, to hold communion with the members of the neighbouring congregations, as being still of the same body : Nor should they suppose that their connection with the elders of the neighbouring congregation is altogether dissolved, although there be others under whose more immediate inspection they are now placed. Accordingly, when their own elders and those of the neighbouring congregations associate in the exercise of government, it is their duty to submit to that government as the ordinance of Christ, as well as when their

own elders act by themselves. They can no more warrantably decline the authority of neighbouring elders in the exercise of government and discipline, than in the ministry of other ordinances. Nor would the independence and absolute separation of every congregation from others, in matters of government, ever have been thought of, had it not been for the notion that this government was to be exercised by the people; and because it is impracticable for different congregations to associate for that purpose.

Now, upon the same ground that we conclude that it is warrantable for the elders of two or three neighbouring congregations to associate as a Presbytery, in the exercise of government; and that their doing so, particularly in matters difficult, or of general concern, is greatly to the advantage of these congregations, and no way injurious to the ministry of their particular elderships; we may also conclude that it is warrantable and advantageous for a greater number to do so, and for different presbyteries to unite in one synod, or council, to transact such affairs as are connected with the general edification of the body. And with such associations, according to their extent, subordination is necessarily connected. That which proves the former proves also the latter. It is not the conduct of individuals only, belonging to the association, that is subject to its judgment and censure, but the conduct of societies also.

To this it is objected, that it supposes a plan of government utterly impracticable, and which never can be followed out, unless we might suppose that there

could be an association of elders from all places of the world. But, although an association of elders through all the extent of the visible church should be impracticable, that is no argument against extending it, as far as circumstances and the ends of edification will admit. All the Christians in the world cannot meet together for worship in one assembly, yet surely it is their duty to assemble, and that in as great a number as is practicable, and may consist with the design of the institution. Because, it may be necessary, on account of numbers, or distance of habitation, to divide a congregation into two or three, that is no reason why it should be divided into ten or twenty; nor ought they to divide into smaller congregations, if their edification can be equally promoted in those that are larger. So it is here. The actual communion of the church in government, is to be followed out to all the extent in which it is practicable; and that may yet be found to be far greater than is generally supposed. Besides, the objection might be retorted, as applying with equal force against the plan of government which Independents contend for. They plead, that all the congregation ought to concur in the government and discipline exercised; yet they find it necessary, ordinarily, to proceed in the absence of several, otherwise the business would be neglected.

2. Such association of elders in the exercise of government, as is here pleaded for, is highly necessary for maintaining communion in the church. The members of different congregations, and of different presbyterial

churches, are bound to hold communion as they have opportunity ; but how can they do so, unless there be some due and effectual means for removing those obstructions that may occur ? A congregation, or the majority of it, may fall into such errors in principle, corruptions in worship, or relaxation of discipline, that others cannot hold communion with them till the scandal be removed. What is to be done in this case ? Independents tell us, that any neighbouring church may write to them, may instruct and admonish them, which it is their duty to attend to and improve ; and if they do not, but continue in the offence, that neighbouring church may renounce their communion. But this is no more than what any individual may do. It does not provide for any exercise of discipline, which is the mean that Christ has appointed for removing offences, when admonition fails. The rule laid down, in a passage formerly quoted,<sup>1</sup> is not to be restricted to the private offences of an individual, nor to the communion of one congregation ; but is to be considered as applying, in general, to all cases of scandal, otherwise it would be very defective. The rule for dealing with a brother by himself, in matters of private offence, before telling the church, does not intimate that it is only in reference to such offences that discipline is to be exercised ; but it rather supposes that, in matters of public scandal, much more the church is to proceed in discipline, without waiting for a private complainer. In

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 15-17.



like manner, though the rule here laid down mentions particularly the lowest and most ordinary case of scandal, we must not suppose that it will not apply to a scandal, in which several, or even the majority of a congregation, are involved. It would be absurd to imagine, that the regular exercise of discipline should be set aside because a considerable number are involved in the scandal. No doubt, a body of people cannot be excommunicated in a lump ; but there are various degrees of discipline, short of excommunication, and all the individuals of a congregation can be dealt with severally, according to the degree of their guilt. But, on the Independent plan this could not be done.

The communion of the church may be obstructed, or individuals injured, by instances of maladministration, for which the Independent plan admits of no adequate remedy. One or a few members are excommunicated by a congregation unjustly, or, at least, they think so, and under that sentence they must lie without appeal to any other judgment under heaven. Though there were another congregation within their reach, they cannot be received without breaking up communion between the two congregations. It is not sufficient that the congregation, to which the complaint is made, apply for, and receive, information from the other about the grounds of their procedure, which we are told may be done. For, besides that several congregations may be interested and require information, there is here no provision for the relief of those that are unjustly cast out. However unjust the sentence may appear, who is to reverse it ? None of those congregations to

whom the parties apply, can do it, and the congregation which passed the sentence will not do it, not being yet convinced of its injustice. Of consequence, the parties must lie under the sentence, or neighbouring congregations must make no account of it, and break up communion with that which passed it; and this is all that can be done, whatever injustice and irregularity they may have been chargeable with in that business.

Some will reply, that, according to their plan of procedure, there is no great danger of such an irregular and unjust sentence as is here supposed: This may be frequent in church-courts which proceed in sentences by a majority, and where a prevailing party, or faction, may carry any measure by a vote, notwithstanding all the opposition that the minority can make; but with them—the procedure must be unanimous, and so cannot be regulated by the influence of a party. But if discipline must be delayed till the judgment of all be fully satisfied, and so fully convinced of the propriety of procedure as that they can give their vote, it may lie over long enough, unless a fear of being joined with the pannel, and of being cast out along with him, help forward the conviction. Nor does that unanimity, which usually obtains, afford such a security as is alleged, if we may believe the account given of it by one who seems to be no stranger to its causes and consequences.—“No doubt, such deeds must be the unanimous acts of the body. But what is this unanimity, and how is it obtained? It is the verbal assent merely of the whole body to measures proposed by those who have the rule over them. (We grant



that with them it lies to propose such measures). But if the body expressing this assent is part swayed by the judgment of those who are over them, whom, with reason, it may be, and according to precept, they are called to honour and esteem, is there a part perhaps also, who, from hearing only somewhat of the merits of the cause, by unavoidable non-attendance at church-meetings, and other hindrances, know little about it as a whole? Are there some who, having high thoughts of the authority of a church, and seeing the stream of opinion running one way, readily yield to it? Are there others in love with quietness,—passive, and unwilling from this disposition alone, to stand in the way of the church, as they speak, or to disturb it? Are there suspicions remaining with some or all of these classes, that the judgment of rulers, or of majorities, may not be altogether in the spirit nor according to the doctrine of Jesus? Do we call this unanimity? By no means. Here is something like lording over God's heritage. Here is subjection and trust in the faithfulness of the church, such as no church is entitled to require, or ought to receive."

Further, there are sometimes causes of such difficulty, or of general concern to several congregations, as that they cannot be properly decided by the eldership of any particular congregation. For such causes, many Independents admit the propriety of a synod composed of the elders of several congregations, with other messengers; but they deny that such a synod has any power, except to consult and advise, or that it can enforce its decision by any censure. But if such a synod

be warranted in the word, as they say it is, it must be regarded as an ordinance of Christ ; and its decision, if agreeable to the word, must be of the same authority, and of the same obligation upon the conscience, as any other judgment of the church. Disobedience to it is as really a refusing to "hear the church," as in other cases where she is warranted to give a decision, and must as really, according to the degree of offence, expose to the censure which Christ has appointed : And this censure, in any degree that the case may require, may be inflicted by the synod, if circumstances admit of a regular procedure in it ; if otherwise, direction may be given concerning it. A principal branch of that government which Christ has appointed in his church is to determine controversies in matters of faith or practice ; and if a synod be authorized by him, or have his warrant for this, we must grant that they have an equal warrant for every other part of government, and authority for every exercise of it which they can regularly overtake. We have no ground from Scripture to suppose that authority is given to any for one part of government, and not for another part of it ; although it may be readily admitted, that, in certain cases, one part of it may be practicable where another is not. But,

3. There is yet more direct evidence of the warrantableness of various associations of elders in the exercise of government, and of the subordination of one judicatory to another, in what is recorded in the New Testament about the practice of church-government in the days of the apostles. It is universally admitted,

that their practice, or what was done under their direction, is a warrant for our practice still, in every thing that was not extraordinary and peculiar to their office as apostles. Now, in the first place, it can be evinced that, in the times of the apostles, the elders of a single congregation were subordinate to a presbytery composed of the elders of neighbouring congregations, and in the exercise of government, as well as in other parts of their ministry, subject to their review and correction. It has been proved, that the church at Jerusalem, at Corinth, at Ephesus, &c., consisted of a plurality of congregations: And however far any of the elders might have a fixed charge in the several congregations, or otherwise, they must have exercised government in them to a certain degree. Yet this did not set aside the government of the elders in general over these congregations, nor preclude the exercise of it in any case that might require it. These churches, severally, are addressed, and mentioned in the singular number as one church, notwithstanding that they consisted of a plurality of congregations; and the only reason that can be given for this is, that these congregations were united under one presbytery. No reason can be given why the congregations in Jerusalem, and not all those in Judea, are called one church, or those in Ephesus, and not all that were in Asia, but their being particularly connected by the stated government and joint oversight of one presbytery. In all other respects they were one with all the churches around. They were one body with the whole visible church, and of one faith, profession, and worship. The groundless

pretence of there being but one congregation, in each of these places, has been already considered. Therefore, whatever proves a plurality of congregations, in any of these churches, serves also to prove the superintendence of one presbytery over the whole. And besides, we read of a meeting of the elders of Jerusalem, in general, for directing the affairs of the church.<sup>1</sup> And the elders of Ephesus are addressed by Paul as having a joint oversight of all the flock.<sup>2</sup>

We have also in the New Testament an example of a synod, or an association of office-bearers for the exercise of government,—more extensive than of the elders of a congregation, or of a presbyterial church ; and to which different presbyterial churches were subject, and their presbyteries of course subordinate. We refer to what is usually called the synod of Jerusalem, of which we have an account in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts. We have already shewn that this synod, by whatever name any choose to call it, was composed of office-bearers,—the apostles and elders : And it was not confined to the elders of any one congregation, nor of any one presbyterial church, but was of a larger extent. The apostles were not fixed elders in any church ; Paul and Barnabas were present with other commissioners from the church at Antioch ; and some, no doubt, were elders of the church at Jerusalem : But there is no ground to conclude that all the elders mentioned were of that church, merely because we are told that the meeting was held there. There is great

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xxi. 18, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xx. 28.

probability that there were elders present from different churches in Judea, from Samaria, and other places. The meeting was convened for, and actually performed, a very important part of church-government. It met to decide a controversy that was like to cause great trouble to the church, and to give direction about what was necessary to maintain communion between Jews and Gentiles. And the "decrees" about these matters were sent, not to the brethren at Antioch only, but to others, and especially, to all the churches of the Gentiles for the regulation of their conduct.<sup>1</sup> These particulars, as they exhibit the substance of what Presbyterians plead for with respect to synods, might be largely illustrated and confirmed; but the answering of the objections of our opponents will introduce what may be further necessary for that purpose.

The objections of Independents against the argument, founded on this passage, to prove the warrant and authority of a synod, are many and various, and some of them eversive one of another; yea, objections inconsistent one with another, are sometimes advanced by the same person. Some tell us, that as the false teachers who troubled the church at Antioch, pretended to be instructed and commissioned by the apostles to teach the obligation of the law of the Gentiles,—it was to ascertain whether or not this was so, that a deputation was sent to Jerusalem. That the false teachers pretended any such instruction and commission, we are not informed. It may be they did;

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv. 23; xvi. 4.



but the dispute at Antioch was about the doctrine itself which they taught, and not about any such pretence as is supposed. And, surely, the fact, whether or not they had got such a commission from the apostles, might have been ascertained at less trouble and expense, than by sending Paul, Barnabas, and others, all the way from Antioch to Jerusalem? At any rate, there could have been no occasion to convene a large meeting of elders to learn if the apostles had given any such commission. And, indeed, we read of no inquiry at all into that matter; but only of a deliberation about the doctrine itself, and whether the Gentiles were bound to observe circumcision and the law of Moses, or not.

Others again object, that nothing in this passage can be pleaded as a warrant for a synod, or for a like procedure now, because this was an application to inspired apostles, and they declare the mind of the Holy Ghost, which none now can pretend to do. But the reference was made, not to the apostles only, but to the elders also; indeed, some who make this objection, also insist, that all the church in Jerusalem met and judged in this matter. Surely, it will not be asserted, that they were all inspired as well as the apostles. Nor did the apostles and elders proceed and give judgment by immediate inspiration. They disputed, they reasoned, they examined Scripture proof, and compared with that testimony the work of God in the conversion of the Gentiles; upon all which they formed their judgment, proceeding in such a way as any ordinary Synod may do. As for what they say, that “it seemed good to



the Holy Ghost,"<sup>1</sup> it has no reference to any immediate inspiration, nor to any thing of such a peculiar nature as to prevent any synod, declaring the mind of God in his word, from using the same language : for they refer to the mind of the Holy Ghost as declared in the word, and, agreeably thereto, manifested in his work.<sup>2</sup> And when they say, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, *and to us*," they are not to be considered, not even the inspired apostles, as joining their authority with that of the Spirit to be a ground and rule of faith, but as intimating their ministerial authority for declaring the mind of the Spirit about the freedom of the Gentiles from the law, and for enjoining upon them "those necessary things" mentioned.

Others allege, that we have nothing here but an application from one church or congregation to another for advice about a matter of difficulty, and that the application was made rather to that at Jerusalem than to one nearer, for some particular reasons. But we have seen that the reference was made to the apostles and elders who met at Jerusalem, and not to the church there as such, which surely could not pretend authority to "lay a burden" upon a sister-church. Besides, the advice, as it is called, is not returned to the church at Antioch only, as it should have been in that case, but to others also whom we have no account of as seeking it. Nor have we any account that the church at Antioch met to form any judgment in consequence of that supposed advice ; but, on the contrary, they and others

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xvi. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Acts, xvi. 13-18.

received with submission the determination of the synod, and “rejoiced for the consolation.”

Again, others who admit that this was a synod, yet insist that it could only consult and advise, and had no authority to command and enjoin; that it exercised no jurisdiction, and inflicted no censure. But the authority of a church-court is not, as some would represent it, a dominion over the consciences of church-members, nor a power to enjoin what it pleases, or indeed, any thing in its own name. It is an authority to enjoin and command in Christ's name what he has prescribed. A parent may command a child to perform duty, as being authorized by the law of God to do so, while it would be altogether preposterous for the child to command the parent. In like manner, the elders of the church have authority, by the institution of Christ, to command and enjoin, in his name, matters of duty. And on this ground, obedience and submission to them are enjoined upon church-members.<sup>1</sup> The apostles commanded matters of duty in Christ's name.<sup>2</sup> Timothy also was authorized to command.<sup>3</sup> And are we to suppose, that the apostles were deprived of their authority on this occasion? or, that the elders were divested of their office when judging of a cause that extended beyond the bounds of their own congregation? Are we to think, that their authority arises only from their relation to a congregation, and is limited by the bounds of it? But here, say some, there is not a word of authority, nor any thing like the style of

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thess. iii. 4, 6, 10, 12.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. i. 3.; iv. 11.; vi. 17.

it in the judgment expressed; there is nothing but a friendly advice: "If ye abstain—ye shall do well." Do they then imagine, that Presbyterians are so foolish as to suppose that authority lies in the form of language used? And do they imagine that the apostles always laid aside their authority when they saw meet to use language of entreaty,—to beseech and to exhort? Whatever was the style of language used by this synod, the authority exercised is very manifest. It was decreed that the Gentiles were not under obligation to circumcise and observe the law of Moses; but that they ought to abstain from fornication, from meats offered to idols, from things strangled, and from blood; and they "laid a burden upon" them as to these necessary things.

It is further urged, that there was no censure inflicted, no discipline exercised upon the false teachers, nor any certification of it in case of disobedience. But must a synod, on every occasion, inflict discipline, whether they have a call to it or not, in order to prove their authority? Or will any affirm, that the apostles had not authority even to excommunicate any member of the church, when his offence deserved it, because they did it not on this occasion? It cannot, however, with justice, be said that they inflicted no censure. They passed a severe censure upon the false teachers, as guilty of troubling the church, and subverting souls. And though they did not formally exercise discipline upon them, by rebuke and excommunication, this was no evidence of their want of authority for it. These false teachers were not present to be dealt with according to the prescribed form of discipline;

and if there were any present who had been of their sentiments,<sup>1</sup> they were now satisfied, and submitted to the judgment given, so that there was no occasion of discipline towards them. Nor is it of any weight, that there was no certification of censure in case of disobedience; for that would follow of course, according to the degree and manner of opposition which any might be found chargeable with.

There are some who further plead, that even according to the principles of Presbyterians, this judgment or advice could not be binding on all to whom it was sent, as there were no representatives from any except the church at Antioch. It is very probable, that there were elders present from other churches besides Antioch. Paul and Barnabas, as they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declared the conversion of the Gentiles; and they would, no doubt, declare also the design of their going to Jerusalem at this time: so that it is most likely, that elders from the churches there would go along with them, to attend a cause of such general concern. But, even supposing that there had been no elders from any of the churches of Syria and Cilicia, this would not make any material difference. The authority of a synod does not arise from representation, nor is the power of the members delegated by the churches with which they are particularly connected. They receive their power only from Christ, and it is not affected by the absence of such as might have a voice if they were present. Independents, surely, will not admit, that the absence of some of their

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xv. 5.

members can prevent, or make void, a decision of their church-meeting.

But, besides the exceptions of Independents against particular arguments, there are some objections of a more general nature, of which it may be necessary to take some notice. For example, it is urged that, in the New Testament, churches are addressed as separate and independent, without mention of any association for government, or any direction given concerning it ; particularly, the seven churches of Asia, which were at no great distance from one another, are addressed separately, and each is commended or reproved, according to the state of matters in it, without any mention of an association in government for correcting what was amiss in any of them.<sup>1</sup> There is, indeed, a particular address to each of these churches, because there was something peculiar in the case of each, which required it ; yet these addresses were not sent separately to the several churches, but the general epistle, comprehending them all, was addressed and sent to all the churches in common.<sup>2</sup>

This, at least, shews that they were not so unconnected, and independent of one another, as some would suppose. For, had there not been such a different state of matters in these churches, the address would have been as much one as that to the churches of Galatia, to which, as one body, various reproofs and directions are given. And, although there be no mention of an association of the elders of all these churches, for cor-

<sup>1</sup> Rev. ii. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. i. 4, 11.



recting what was amiss in any of them, this is no proof that there was no such association, or that it was improper. There is as little mention of any meeting for consultation and advice, or of the correspondence of any of these sister-churches, which yet our opponents consider as warranted and necessary in such cases. It is sufficient to warrant an association of the elders of different churches, that we have some examples of it recorded in the New Testament, although it be not mentioned on every occasion which we might think suitable for introducing it.

Again, it is contended, that it is in *congregational churches alone* that the ends of the institution of the church-state can be attained,—such as the *professed subjection* of souls to Christ's authority, the *joint celebration* of all Gospel-ordinances, and the *preservation* of discipline. It is admitted, that it is the duty of church-members to assemble in particular congregations, yea, that a due observation of many ordinances cannot otherwise take place; and that it is expedient that the members and officers of these congregations be stated and fixed, in order to insure a more regular performance of duty. But in order to attain the ends of a church-state, it is not necessary that these congregations should be unconnected and independent; on the contrary, this would, in a great measure, prevent these ends. While there are some parts of Christian communion that require an association of church-members in particular congregations, there are other parts which require an association of different congregations under one Presbyterial govern-



ment. If it be necessary to have some exercise of government and discipline in every congregation, in order to maintain comfortable communion among the members ; it is also necessary to have such a government as may promote communion between different congregations, and which may apply to such cases as the government of one particular congregation cannot reach.

There are various other things urged against the Presbyterian plan of church government, but the objections are seldom stated in such a way as to admit of a distinct answer. For the most part, they consist of bitter invectives against church-courts, and the power exercised by them. All power in the hands of a church-court, it is assumed, must be downright usurpation and tyranny, although it be no other than is claimed by every Independent congregation,<sup>1</sup> and although it

<sup>1</sup> To exclaim against the tyranny of church-courts comes with a bad grace from Independents, among whom, particularly in Scotland, church power is screwed up to the highest pitch, applied almost to all cases, and supported by all the severity of discipline. Is there no instance among some of them, of a person being excommunicated for declining to pay what he reckoned an unreasonable contribution, which the church had agreed to lay upon him? Or, for maintaining, in opposition to the sentiments of some leading members, that a bishop may lawfully marry a second wife? And, among all of them, or at least the greater part, a difference of sentiment about a case of discipline, however unavoidable that be on account of the different capacities of men, exposes such as have the unhappiness to be in the minority to the danger of excommunication. They boast of the unanimity of their decisions, and the terror of discipline may ensure it, or, at least, the appearance of it, to a considerable degree ; but such a method of securing unanimity, is apt to put one in mind of that which was wont to be practised at a Polish diet.

[To these instances, adduced by the author, and, in corroboration of the remarks by which he introduces them, the inquiring reader may be farther referred to the case of seven members of the Inde-

should be exercised with the greatest moderation. However they may disclaim, in the most positive manner, all power to enact laws, or to enforce them by their own authority, yet they are as positively charged with claiming such a power. And what is the proof? Why, they themselves claim to be judges that their decisions are agreeable to the word, and they inflict censure upon such as will not submit! But is not this objection of equal force against all church-government among Independents also? Does not every church-meeting judge its decisions to be agreeable to the word, and enjoin submission upon all the members of the church, under pain of discipline? Yet, individuals sometimes presume to judge whether the decrees of the church-meeting “are, or are not, consonant to the word

pendent congregation of Perth, who, in the time of Mr Little’s ministry among them, upwards of thirty years ago, were excommunicated in a most summary manner, for refusing to concur with the rest of the members in adopting the version of the Psalms of David, composed by Dr Isaac Watts; and more lately, to the case of the Rev. Alexander Cuthbert, pastor of the Congregational Church of Airdrie who, almost without a moment’s warning, and by a most tyrannical decree of a small club of the members of that congregation, was dismissed from his ministry among them, and thrown, without remeid, upon the wide world. This is a very extraordinary case. It was referred, inconsistently enough with Independent principles, to the examination of four Congregational Ministers in Glasgow, namely, Dr Wardlaw, Rev. Messrs Pullar, Mackenzie, and Russel, who, after patiently hearing a deputation from Mr Cuthbert’s congregation, and Mr Cuthbert himself, solemnly gave judgment in his favour; Mr Cuthbert, however, was dismissed, and his dismissal was confirmed by a decree of the Committee of the Congregational Union. We recommend Mr Cuthbert’s two pamphlets on this subject, and the Reply of the Rev. W. L. Alexander to them, to the attentive perusal of the reader, as curious illustrations of democratic Independent rule.]—EDIT.

of God :” And “ if they determine in the negative, they will refuse submission, and be of course excommunicated.”

The great objection, and that which has most influence upon many, is, that, on the Presbyterian plan, the elders and church-courts engross all the power, and the people are deprived of all liberty. But what is this liberty of the people for which Independents are such advocates, and which, it is asserted, can only be enjoyed upon their plan ? Is it a liberty of judging for themselves in all matters of faith and worship, and of following the dictates of their consciences concerning the rule of the word ? That this belongs to them, is acknowledged by the presbyterian court as well as by the church-meeting ; and it is a mercy, that, in the present time, neither the one nor the other can prevent the exercise of it. Is it a liberty of free choice as to those who are to be over them in the Lord ? The principles of the presbyterians in favour of this liberty are avowed, and among many of them the right is as fully enjoyed as among Independents. It must be then a liberty to rule, and to exercise the government of the church. Without this, it seems, the people are ciphers ; yet the advocates for the wildest schemes of civil liberty do not insist for so much. Of all the theories about government now afloat in the world, none suppose that the people should retain the exercise of it in their own hands.

Besides, if the exercise of government in the church be, as is contended, essential to the liberty which Christ

has bestowed on his people, how is it that any of them, male or female, old or young, are excluded from it? Or, why does not this supposed liberty include a right to preach the Gospel, and dispense the sacraments, as well as to exercise discipline? But, say some, by the liberty of the people, injured by the presbyterian plan, is meant, not merely their right to share in the exercise of government, but also the privilege of being judged by their fellow-members in the church-meeting, and not by the elders alone. Be it so. But what is this privilege, or what are its advantages? Are their members more intelligent than the elders? or, are they less liable to prejudice and party influence? “Nay; but it is necessary that the people be judged by those of their own order, especially in a controversy with elders, who may obtain improper favour from judges of the same rank with themselves.” But if this reasoning be good, and if this supposition be well founded, what is to become of the elders of an Independent congregation, when they are judged by the people in a church-meeting?

It is unnecessary to take any further notice of objections of this nature. Numbers of them, every whit as specious, are readily thrown out against every ordinance of Christ. It is therefore our duty to inquire what is the divine institution about the order and government of the church; and having learned this from the word, to adhere to it stedfastly, without regarding vain *reasonings*. To assist in this inquiry, the preceding pages may be of use to those who have no better help. Those who wish further information on this subject,

particularly in reference to presbyterial churches and the subordination of church-courts, may receive ample satisfaction by a perusal of the controversy between the Presbyterians and Independents in the Westminster Assembly, as the same is set forth in a publication, entitled, *The REASONS presented by the Dissenting Brethren against certain Propositions concerning PRESBYTERIAL GOVERNMENT, &c. together with the ANSWER of the Assembly of Divines to those Reasons of Dissent.*





ESSAYS

ON

THE CHURCH.



## ESSAY I.

THE VISIBLE CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

MUCH is said in Scripture concerning the church of God, which shews it to be a subject of great importance, and one that calls for particular attention. This attention is the more necessary on account of the evils and irregularities which result from misapprehension of the doctrine laid down in the Word concerning it. From ignorance of, or inattention to, the true nature of the church, there is frequently a sad prostitution of ordinances, by admitting to the privileges of the church-state, those who have no title to the character of church members. By others, unwarranted terms of admission are insisted on, and such as exclude many that ought to be received as members of the church, particularly the infant-seed of believers. The leading or principal arguments whereby they attempt to justify themselves in this, are founded on erroneous notions concerning the church. People are often in danger of imbibing these erroneous sentiments, without being aware of the consequences to which they lead. Many, too, make

<sup>1</sup> Originally published in the Christian Magazine, vol. vii., p. 63.

divisions, and form parties, inconsistent with that unity which the Word of God ascribes to the church.

On all these accounts, it cannot be improper to attempt some illustration of the doctrine of Scripture about the *Visible Church*, and to shew who ought to be accounted members of it, and admitted to its privileges. This is a subject which, more than a century ago, underwent a large discussion; but the writings upon it are in the hands of few, and are little inquired after, because for a long time there has not been such occasion as there is now to peruse them. But though these writings could be easily obtained, the largeness of the discussion, and the mode of reasoning then in use, would prevent the greater part of readers from receiving much advantage by them.

It is not proposed to enter here into a controversy about the various meanings which have been put upon the word *church* as used in Scripture; only it may be necessary to advert to the general meaning of the term, and to some of its most ordinary applications. 1. In its primary and general signification, the word denotes an assembly called out and convened for some particular purpose. It is applied by the town-clerk of Ephesus to a lawful meeting of the citizens, called together about some civil business, and also to the unlawful and riotous assembly convened by Demetrius for persecuting the apostles, Acts, xix. 39, 45. The word in both these verses, which is translated *assembly*, is the same that is usually translated *church*. 2. The word is also used indefinitely, to express an assembly of Christians, called together

for any religious purposes. A congregation met for the worship of God is called by this name, 1. Cor. 14, 19, 28, 34. The assembly of apostles, elders, and other office-bearers, which met at Jerusalem to determine the question about the circumcision of the Gentiles, is called a church; Acts. 15. 22. "It pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church," or assembly, as it might be rendered, intimating the unanimity of the decision and procedure in that matter. 3. The most common use of this term in the New Testament, is to denote the whole body of Christians, as one great assembly called out of the world, and gathered together under one head, namely, Christ, including those who are thus called and gathered externally and visibly, as well as those that are spiritually gathered in to Christ, and effectually called to the blessings of salvation. It is the church, in this extensive signification, that is the subject of inquiry in this essay, omitting the consideration of those particular associations of Christians which are called churches in Scripture, except so far as to remark, that the name is given to them principally on the ground of their being parts of that one body, and, therefore, in full consistency with the unity that is ascribed to it. When these particular churches are spoken of, it is with some expression or reference that indicates their particular nature and limited extent, as the church in such a city, or at such a place; whereas, when the church is mentioned in general, and without any such limiting reference, it is to be understood in all the extent above expressed.

In order to illustrate the definition or description

given of this one catholic church, it is necessary to observe the different views in which it is exhibited. Sometimes it is spoken of according to all its extent, as including the whole family in heaven and earth, the church triumphant in heaven, as well as the church militant on earth ; as in Hebrews, xii. 23. The apostle speaks of the Hebrews as “ come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven ; and to the spirits of just men made perfect.” At other times, the church is spoken of with a more direct application to that part of it which is yet in this world under the administration of outward ordinances, and with which we are more immediately concerned as having communion together in and by these ordinances. “ There is one body,” says the apostle to the Ephesians, “ and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended upon high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ : Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Again, the church is sometimes spoken of with particular reference to its spiritual and invisible state, and

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. iv. 4,—13. 1. Cor. xii.



with a confined application to true believers in it, as when it is said, "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word."<sup>1</sup> At other times, it is mentioned in such a way as can be applied only to its external and visible state in this world, as when we are told that "Saul made havock of the church."<sup>2</sup> Now, in reference to these different views of the church, it is common to speak of the visible and of the invisible church; but this is no more inconsistent with the unity of the Catholic church, than when we speak of the church militant, and the church triumphant. Though every thing that is spoken of concerning the church in general will not apply to every part in particular, this does not prevent it from being in many other respects one. And all true believers, as they belong to the invisible church, have also, while in this world, an external character and privilege as members of the church visible.

But it will be said, though the church may be accounted one in respect of true believers, who belong both to the visible and invisible state, yet if the visible church be considered as comprehending mere formal professors and hypocrites, it cannot be counted one church with the invisible, inasmuch as every thing that is attributed to the church will not apply to all its members. But this is no just objection to the unity of the church; for there are several things applicable to the visible church, even supposing it to

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. v. 25, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Acts. viii. 3.

consist of true believers only, which will not apply to the church as invisible, nor in any respect to those members of it who are now in glory. The visible church is constituted in the form of a kingdom, under an external administration of laws and ordinances, and its members occupy different stations, which things will not apply to them that are in the church triumphant. Yet this is no reason why the saints in heaven and those on earth may not be accounted one church. In like manner, though there be many things peculiar to the spiritual and invisible state of the church, which will not apply to all who are members of the church visible, that is no just objection against calling the church one. And though hypocrites have no interest in the privileges of the church as invisible, nor any spiritual and saving communion with Christ the Head, or with the members of his mystical body, yet they are in a state of professed subjection to him, as subjects of his visible kingdom; they have externally the same character, and enjoy the same external privileges in the visible church as true believers; and in respect of these things they belong to the body of Christ. The visible church is called the body of Christ in 1 Cor. xii. 12, for it is that church which, like the natural body, has members in different offices, as hands, eyes, &c.; and hypocrites may so far belong to that body as to bear office in the church, and be accounted eyes or hands, of which we have an instance in the case of Judas.

That the church, considered in its visible and external state in this world, comprehends hypocrites

and mere formal professors, as well as those that are regenerated, is evident from the various representations of it which the Scriptures exhibit. The visible church is compared to a barn floor, that is filled with both wheat and chaff.<sup>1</sup> The kingdom of heaven, which is the visible church under another name, is compared to a field that is covered with tares as well as wheat, and to a drag-net which incloses fishes of different kinds, good and bad.<sup>2</sup> The members of the kingdom of heaven are compared to virgins at a marriage feast, some of whom were wise, and some foolish.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, unnecessary to multiply quotations in confirmation of this point.

All must admit that there are hypocrites mingled with true Christians in the church-state, and that they some way get in to the enjoyment of external privileges along with them. But many who must admit this, at the same time maintain that these hypocrites are not, and ought not, to be called members of the church; that their admission to the privileges of church members is only because they impose upon the church by a false profession, and that none ought to be admitted but those who, in the judgment of charity, may be accounted real saints, though men cannot judge with certainty in that matter, because they do not know the heart.

But this representation of the matter is, in several respects, very exceptionable. It is a mistake to suppose that the admission of persons to the state and

<sup>1</sup> Matth. iii. 12.    <sup>2</sup> Matth. xiii. 24, 47.    <sup>3</sup> Matth. xxv. 1, 2.

privilege of church members, must proceed upon a judgment about their spiritual state as it is in the sight of God. Few will be so presumptuous as to pretend to a judgment of certainty about others concerning that matter; and as to what is called a judgment of charity, it is too uncertain in itself, and the grounds of it are too vague and indeterminate for making the privilege of any to depend upon it. Some are so abundantly liberal, that they will profess a favourable judgment, and pretend to act upon it almost without any ground; and they think it very uncharitable to entertain a contrary judgment about almost any. Others, again, as a ground of that judgment, insist for an account of the experiences of persons, of the manner of their conversion, or of God's method of dealing with their souls. And surely if they are called to judge of the reality of grace in the heart, the more evidence, so much the more probability of a true judgment; and therefore, on that supposition, they should insist for more, even a disclosure of all that passes in their hearts. Favourable and promising-like appearances of real religion may be observed in some professors more than in others, and on account of these it is natural to form a more hopeful opinion about their state before God, and the event of their profession, and there need be no objection to call this, if any think it proper, a judgment of charity.<sup>1</sup> But a judgment of this kind is not the rule of admission to the privileges of the visible church, nor of church com-

<sup>1</sup> Philip. i. 7.

munion among the members of it. It is too uncertain for that purpose. In external appearance, and in all that the judgment of men can reach to, hypocrites may far outstrip many real saints ; and the most promising-like appearances often come to nothing. The apostles of Christ did not proceed upon this judgment of charity in receiving persons into the church, and in treating them as members of it. When addressing the members of the church, they plainly intimated that there were hypocrites among them, which could not well consist with a judgment of charity in favour of the spiritual estate of each of them individually. Nay, they treated those as church members about whose spiritual state and issue of their profession they were much afraid. " I am afraid of you," said Paul to the Galatians, " lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you."<sup>1</sup>

It is not upon a judgment concerning appearances, but concerning realities, that we are to proceed in admitting people to the privileges of the church-state, and in holding communion with them as church members. The ground of their admission is a serious and scriptural profession of which men are capable to judge,<sup>2</sup> and not their connection between the appearance of grace and the reality of it, which even the judgment of charity must leave undecided. There is

<sup>1</sup> Galat. iv. 11, 20.

<sup>2</sup> A profession may be evidently serious, though it do not proceed from gracious sincerity. A man may think as he speaks, and yet may be much mistaken about his own heart.—Deut. v. 28, 29.



an external character belonging to the church as visible which can very well come under the judgment of men ; and a due attention to the Word of God will enable to form a true judgment of that external character in the case of all that pretend to it. Is the church a society called out of this world, and separated from it ? This will apply even to hypocrites who are externally called and separated, though they come short of that spiritual and saving calling which is the attainment of true believers. Is the church in this world, and externally, a peculiar kingdom under the administration of Christ, ruled externally by the laws and ordinances of his appointment ? Hypocrites may be found regular in an external subjection to these laws, and outward observance of these ordinances. Is the church described as a company of believers in Christ ? Even hypocrites are said, in a certain sense, to have believed in his name.<sup>1</sup> Is the church a congregation of saints ? There is an external character of saintship that will extend even to hypocrites. The members of the church are usually called *visible* saints, and they are not so called because of their having some *appearance* of being internally sanctified ; but because of an external holiness of profession and character, or an external relation to God, which man can see and judge of ; and in this external character hypocrites may be nothing behind true Christians. With respect to relation to God as members of his church, there is one kind founded upon the external administration of

<sup>1</sup> John. ii. 23, 24.



the covenant, which extends to all the members of the visible church ; and there is a spiritual and saving relation connected with an internal and spiritual administration of the covenant which is peculiar to true believers. Accordingly, the Scripture speaks of some who are in Christ by external profession and privilege in the church-state, who have not that spiritual and vital union which secures the fruits of true holiness.<sup>1</sup>

The judgment upon which persons are to be received as members of the visible church, is not an erroneous judgment, or such as may be false in the case of many, and yet to be rested in because we can do no better ; but by God himself, persons are accounted members of the visible church upon such grounds as lie open to man's judgment. When the apostles addressed professors of religion, both real saints and hypocrites, as church members, it was under the direction of the spirit of inspiration. The Spirit of God represents the visible church as a great house, in which there are vessels of different materials, some of gold and silver, some of wood or earth, some to honour, some to dishonour.<sup>2</sup> This is meant of church members, who are as different in respect of their state before God, as gold and clay, and yet all are vessels in God's house. This distinction is not made in reference to the different offices that men hold in the church, some of which may be reckoned more honourable than others ; but it intimates the difference that exists between real saints and hypocrites, for it is brought in, as accounting for what is said in

<sup>1</sup> John. xv. 2, 6.

<sup>2</sup> 2. Tim. ii. 20.

the two preceding verses, about the apostacy of some members of the church, and the security of others. The faith of some was overthrown, but others stood on a sure foundation ; for “in a great house there are some vessels to honour and some to dishonour.” And it is not in the way of accommodation to the method of man’s judgment that God speaks of hypocrites as members of his church, for he himself bestows church privileges upon them. He not only warrants his servants to dispense to them, on their profession, the seals of his covenant, but he bestows even on hypocrites gifts and offices peculiar to the church. Nay, hypocrites may have not only the baptism of water, but the baptism of the Spirit, in a certain sense. The effusion of the Spirit in miraculous gifts upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, is called a baptism of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> It was this divine baptism that determined Peter to receive Cornelius and his household as members of the church, and as such, to baptize them with water, notwithstanding their being Gentiles.<sup>2</sup> And a baptism of this kind may be included, when the apostle speaks of all the members of the church as baptized by one spirit into one body.<sup>3</sup> Who can deny that hypocrites may be the subjects of such baptism, in ordinary, or extraordinary gifts of the Spirit ? or that these gifts may intimate God’s call to a public office in the church ? Judas was called by Christ himself, and sent by him to preach the Gospel ; nor can we doubt of his being endowed with the same power of miracles as the other

<sup>1</sup> Acts. i. 5.<sup>2</sup> Acts. x. 47.<sup>3</sup> 1. Cor. xii. 13.

disciples. Can this leave any room to deny that he was a member of the visible church?

Some, however, will still urge that real saints and true believers only, are members of the visible church, and that if hypocrites be admitted to the privileges of it, this is only because, in the judgment of charity, they are reputed real saints by men who cannot judge the heart; for not only are the persons who composed the particular churches to whom the apostles wrote, called saints, but such attainments and privileges are ascribed to them as are peculiar to true believers. Consequently, if any hypocrites were among them, they were not really church-members; they were only accounted so in the judgment of charity, which was erroneous as to them.

In answer to this it may be observed, first, that the judgment expressed about church members in these epistles, could not be erroneous judgment as to any, for the apostles expressed no other judgment concerning them, than what the Spirit of God, under whose inspiration they wrote, directed them to. Secondly, although characters and privileges peculiar to true believers be ascribed to these churches, when addressed in general, this neither implies that all the individuals were real saints, nor that others were found, in the judgment of charity, to consider them as such. Such things might be said of these churches, because true of the better part,—the members of the church invisible, for whose sake the visible church-state and ordinances are maintained; although they could not be said about every individual member of these

churches. And sufficient intimation was given, that the things spoken which were peculiar to true believers, were not to be understood as applicable to all who were addressed as belonging to the church. Christ frequently addressed the twelve disciples in such words as were applicable only to eleven of them, of which we have a striking example in these words—"Verily, I say unto you, that ye who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."<sup>1</sup> On one or two occasions he intimated an exception, as when he said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?"<sup>2</sup> "Ye are clean, but not all;"<sup>3</sup> but it was seldom he did so.

Neither were these particular churches addressed in a general way as real saints, because men were obliged, in the judgment of charity, to make such an account of all the members of them. Besides, what has been already observed of the apostle's expressing concerning some of them apprehensions not very consistent with such a judgment, it may be farther remarked, that some of the members of these churches were of such a character, as gave little or no ground to form such a judgment about them. Although there might be no sufficient ground to determine that they were hypocrites, because it is not possible for man to determine the degree of evil that may be consistent

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xix. 28.<sup>2</sup> John. vi. 70.<sup>3</sup> John. xiii. 10.

with a state of grace ; yet with many of them there was little, if any, ground for a positive judgment, even in a way of charity, that they were real saints. Some in the church of Corinth were guilty of fornication and idolatry, and held dangerous errors in matters of doctrine. Envy, strife, bitter contentions, and gross disorders in public worship, prevailed among them. Nay, so far from laying these evils to heart, they were “puffed up,” and this is charged upon them *generally*. Now, though this state of matters did not warrant the conclusion that they were hypocrites, it did not afford ground for a positive judgment that they were all real saints. The apostle, however, still addressed them as church members. He warned them, indeed, that he would proceed to censure, and even to excommunication, if they persisted obstinately in these evils ; but if he did not still look upon them as church members, why did he not instantly cut them off, or declare that they were no longer to be considered in that character ? But though he had instantly passed a sentence of excommunication on account of these scandals, this did not imply that they were not members of the church, but rather the contrary. He judged those who were *within*, and left those who were *without* to the judgment of God.<sup>1</sup> It may be added, that the excommunication of these scandalous persons, if it had been proceeded in, would have intimated no difference of judgment about their spiritual state ; for as the ad-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 12.



mission of persons to the privileges of the church, does not proceed upon the charitable judgment that they are real saints, so the exclusion of any from these privileges is not to proceed upon the uncharitable judgment that they are hypocrites.

The challenge given to the wicked for taking God's covenant in their mouths while living in the practice of wickedness (Psalm, l. 16), says nothing against accounting these to be members of the church, and admitting them to its privileges, whose profession is good, and their practice regular, although in the sight of God they may be hypocrites. The challenge given to the man who came to the marriage feast without the wedding garment (Math. xxii. 12), only intimates that hypocrites will be openly exposed and punished for their hypocrisy at the day of judgment; and they are justly punished for their hypocrisy, as well as for resting in an outward profession and the external privileges of the church-state, in the neglect of true religion and spiritual privileges; but it says nothing against our making account of these as church-members, who make a serious profession of religion, although we cannot judge what their true state before God is. Nay, it does not even imply that persons themselves are to abstain from making a profession, and from seeking church privileges, till they are certain of being in a gracious state. Nor is what is said about apostates (1 John ii. 19) of any more force. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they



were not all of us." It is intimated that their apostacy evidenced they had never been of the number of true believers, but there is nothing against their having been really members of the visible church, before they fell off by their apostacy.

Another important consideration relating to the visible church, is its unity, not merely as one body, comprehending all professors of the true religion, with their children, who at any one time exist in this world ; but its unity in all ages of the world as one body having a permanent existence, though in a form somewhat diversified by a continued succession of members. This, however, must be reserved to another occasion, and we shall close this paper by observing—

1. The unwarrantableness of requiring from persons, in order to their being received as church-members, an account of their experiences in religion, for the purpose of forming some judgment about their spiritual state. No such judgment is necessary in that matter, and therefore no such means are required for its attainment. Every kind of profession, indeed, is not to be received as a ground of admission. If it appears that people consciously dissemble, or if they be utterly ignorant of what they in words profess, or if their profession be openly contradicted by their practice, no account can, in these cases, be made of such profession in order to admission. It is, therefore, often necessary to examine persons about their profession, in order to be satisfied that it is serious ; but to require evidence for some positive judgment that such profession

proceeds from gracious sincerity, is quite another matter. Besides, although some positive judgment were required regarding the gracious state of those who apply for admission, a public account of their experiences would be a very uncertain ground. It would be easy for a confident hypocrite to tell a fine story ; while a real Christian, conscious of the deceit of his heart, might be unable, and certainly would be averse, to say much upon the subject of his experience.

2. The preceding observations lead us to remark further, that one great argument against acknowledging infants as church-members, and admitting them to baptism, is of no weight, viz :—That no judgment can be formed about their spiritual state ; for, if no judgment of that matter is required, even in the case of adults, it cannot be reckoned necessary in the case of infants.

3. Although the admission of persons to the privilege of church-membership is not to proceed upon any judgment about their spiritual state before God, yet it is the duty and interest of every one for himself to make sure of a real saving interest in Christ, and in the spiritual blessings of the covenant. Those who rest in a mere outward profession, and flatter themselves that they will obtain heaven and happiness in the other world, because of the profession they have made, and the privileges they have enjoyed here, will find themselves miserably disappointed. Not every one that saith unto Christ, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter into the glorious state of his kingdom, nor even those who have been endowed with miraculous gifts, and have exercised a profitable

ministry in the church.<sup>1</sup> The Lord Christ will in due time have his church cleared of all hypocrites. “He will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matth. vii. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Matth. iii. 12.

## ESSAY II.

THE UNITY OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

IN a former paper some account is given of the visible church as consisting of all those who make a profession of the true religion,<sup>2</sup> and consequently comprehending both real saints and hypocrites. It is now proposed to illustrate the UNITY of this church, and to shew that the whole body of professed Christians throughout the world constitute ONE CATHOLIC VISIBLE CHURCH.

Some may consider this a point of little consequence, but it is intimately connected with the important subjects of church government and church communion. Accordingly, the institution and existence of a Catholic visible church is by many strenuously denied, and it

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> When we thus describe the members of the visible church as *professors* of religion, we by no means exclude their infant-seed, because their privilege of being church-members, which may be afterwards confirmed, is connected with the profession of their parents. [The author here refers to the papers on Infant Baptism, which will be found in a subsequent part of this volume.—ED.]

is alleged that there is no church of Christ mentioned in the New Testament except a single congregation, which ordinarily assembles in one place for the worship of God, and the Church invisible, “the General Assembly and Church of the First-Born.” Others will allow that Christians in general may be called the church, because they make up the various particular churches that are in the world ; but they consider the Word, in this application, as expressing a mere abstract idea, just as we sometimes use the word *man*, when we speak of all men ; but they will not admit that the whole body of Christians constitutes one real Catholic church. In Scripture, however, this name is given in its primary and most proper application, in as far as it respects a visible state to the whole body of professed Christians ; and the application of it to particular classes of them is only consequential, and in a secondary sense.

That there is one real visible church, comprehending all professors of the true religion, might be confirmed by a variety of arguments, of which only a brief summary can be given in a publication of this kind. In the New Testament, this name is given to the whole body of professed Christians, not as a general term, expressive of a great number of particular churches, but as expressive of one real organised church. The Catholic visible church, or the whole body of Christians composing it, is set forth under such designations, and by such metaphors, as plainly intimate the reality of one Catholic church. And it is to this church that the name of church-members principally relates, and

upon which their privilege principally depends. All Christians are connected in such a way, and are so united in the same privileges, attainments, and relations, as to constitute them one church.

1. The Scripture frequently speaks of one visible Catholic church. It is said, Acts, viii. 3, "As for Saul he made havock of the church," and "he persecuted the church of God, and wasted it."<sup>1</sup> Now, this was not the invisible church as such, for to that his enmity could not reach, nor could his cruel fury affect it. Neither was it only some particular church. That at Jerusalem was particularly exposed, but it was not it only which suffered, but all that called on the name of Jesus, as far as he could get access to them. When he was so zealous about this business as to go even to Damascus, we cannot suppose that the several churches in Judea escaped his fury. And we are told (Acts, ix. 31.), that after his conversion, "the churches had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria," which intimates, that formerly they had suffered by his blind zeal; yet they are all spoken of as one church persecuted by him.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of one Catholic visible church is very plainly declared in 1st Cor. xii, particularly verse 28th, "And God hath set some in the church; first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then, gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."<sup>3</sup> Now, this is meant of a visible church, for it has office-bearers in it,

<sup>1</sup> Galations. i. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Acts. xxvi. 11.

<sup>3</sup> 1. Cor. xii. 28.



“apostles, prophets, teachers,” &c. These belong to the visible church as such, and not to the invisible; and the members are spoken of as in different stations and offices; some as eyes, some as hands, but in the invisible church there is no distinction of that nature. Further, the church here described is not any one particular church, such as that of Corinth. It did not hold true of every particular church, nor even of that of Corinth, that God had set in them all the office-bearers here enumerated. There had not yet been any apostle in the church at Rome, nor were the apostles set in the church of Corinth, though they had occasionally exercised their ministry there. They were placed in the church universal, and not in any particular church. The church here mentioned is the one Catholic church, which comprehends all Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, verse 13. It is that “one body” into which they are “all baptized by one Spirit, whether Jews or Gentiles.” This verse is, indeed, urged by some as an argument that it is the Catholic church invisible that is here described, and that this only is meant, when any thing of a Catholic or universal nature is mentioned. But even admitting that what is said in this verse were applicable only to the church as invisible, other things of an universal extent might apply to it as visible, and the church may be catholic as to its visible as well as in respect of its invisible state. There is no reason, however, for confining what is here said to the invisible state of the church. There is an external and visible

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 13.

baptism by water here supposed, and there is also a baptism of the spirit in respect of gifts, ordinary and extraordinary, that belongs to the visible church, and may extend to any member of it, and to those who have no place in the church invisible. Nor is the name of a church here given to all Christians, because of their composing all the particular churches in the world, but because they are all united together as one body, or one great assembly. This may be still further confirmed by considering—

2. The various designations given to the Catholic visible church, and the metaphors used in relation to it. It is called a "*body*," in particular allusion to the natural body, consisting of various members, all so connected together as to form one body (Rom. xiii. 5.) "We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (1 Cor. xii. 27). "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." This one body is called the church (verse 28); and it is with a particular application to the visible church that this term is used. For as already observed, it is in the visible church only that any hold particular offices, so as to be compared to eyes or hands in the natural body. Nor is it any particular church, such as that of Corinth, to which this designation is given; it is that one body into which all are baptized (verse 13). Christ is the Head of the Church visible, as well as of the invisible, although the union be somewhat different, and whatever reason there be for calling him the Head of the visible church, there must be as good reason for calling it his body, for these terms are relative. And Christ

is not merely a Head of government to the visible church ; for there are not only saving communications to all real saints in it, as members of the church invisible, but there are gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon the members of the visible church as such, which determine nothing as to their spiritual state before God.<sup>1</sup>

The church is also compared to a *political body*. It is called "the kingdom of God," and "the kingdom of heaven." Now, it is not any particular church that is so called ; for the Scripture never speaks of any kingdom of heaven but one. It speaks, indeed, of different states of that kingdom, such as its militant and its triumphant state ; but whether the one state or the other be referred to, the kingdom is never spoken of but in the singular number. And this name, "the kingdom of heaven," or "the kingdom of God," is, in the New Testament, very frequently given to the visible church, as in the thirteenth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew. It is only in the visible church that there is such a mixture as is represented in these passages. In another part of the same Gospel,<sup>2</sup> it is called the kingdom of God, which was to be taken from the Jews and given to the Gentiles ; and it is only the visible church, the possession of which may be transferred from one people to another. The kingdom of God, as to its invisible state and privileges, will never be taken from any that are in possession of it.

The visible church is also set forth under the name of a *city*, which, though it may contain a number of lesser

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Cor. xii. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Matth. xxi. 43.

corporations, is one political body. It is called "the city of God," "the heavenly," "the New Jerusalem," "the holy city," Rev. xxi. By many, this is referred to the glorious state of the church in heaven; and it is admitted, that the full glory of the church must be looked for in the other world; but it is to the highly improved state of the church in this world in the latter days, that the passage principally refers. It is that state of the church into which "the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour," verse 24. But the glory of earthly kings can signify nothing as to the triumphant church, though it may be of great advantage, if rightly applied, to the church visible and militant. Now, the church here described under the name of a city, is not any particular church, it is the church Catholic. The city described is one and singular, including all "the nations of them that are saved," and that "walk in the light of it."

The Catholic church is metaphorically spoken of as *one person*. It is described as "a woman," and the "mother of children"<sup>1</sup>—it is called "the bride, the Lamb's wife."<sup>2</sup> Now, we have already shewn that it is the visible church which is spoken of in this latter passage, and it is no less evident that it is the same which is mentioned in the former. A contrast is stated in the book of Revelation, not between hypocrites and real saints, both of whom may have a Scriptural profession, but between the true church of God, the Spouse of Christ, and the "scarlet-coloured whore, who made the

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xii.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. xxi. 9.

kings of the earth drunk with the wine of her fornication.”<sup>1</sup> Nor is it any objection against giving the name of “the bride,” “the Lamb’s wife,” to the visible church, that hypocrites belong to it. The church of the Jews was spoken of as bearing this character, though all her members were not real saints, any more than all the members of the visible church now are.

There is a variety of other names given to the church, which also confirm this point. It is called “one house” or “family”—“one vineyard”—“one sheep-fold,” &c.; but upon these designations it is unnecessary to enlarge.

3. The main points of union, on account of which Christians are called one body, are such as apply to the whole Catholic church, and are not confined to particular churches. Some of these are mentioned in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians,<sup>2</sup> where we find the apostle exhorting the members of that church to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;” and the argument by which he enforces this exhortation, is taken from the *Unity of the Church*, for the illustration of which several things are adduced. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” The one body here described, is the church visible under the external administration of God’s covenant, and the external ministry of the word and ordinances, and which is the subject of the gifts and offices in the subsequent

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xvii. 1, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. v. 4-6.



verses. “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gifts of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, &c. &c.”<sup>1</sup> All the particulars here named will apply to the church visible. It has been already observed, that in different other passages it is called “one body.” To this church belongs “one Spirit,” some of the members, as belonging to the church invisible, are savingly animated by the Spirit. Others who have not this attainment, may be partakers of the gifts or common influences of the same Spirit, who distributeth to every one as he willeth. There is one Lord, “even Jesus Christ, who is the King and Head of this church.” “There is one faith,” one rule of faith, one doctrine of faith, and there is, or should be, one profession of faith. “There is one baptism,” and one system of ordinances for worship and government. “There is one God and Father of all,” in respect at least of an external adoption; and those who belong to the church invisible have also a spiritual adoption that will never be set aside. Now, these grand articles of union among Christians extend to the whole Catholic church. Such points of union as may be peculiar to particular churches, whether presbyterian or congregational, are not to be compared

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. iv. 8, 11.



with these. Such union as arises from worshipping together within the walls of one house, or from being associated, as may suit conveniency, under the immediate inspection of some certain office-bearers, comes far short of those important unities that extend to and constitute the oneness of the church universal.

4. It may be added, that the character of church members which Christians sustain, and the relation in which they stand to one another as such, have a principal and primary reference to the Catholic church. Their being members of this or that particular church arises merely from their having the opportunity in Providence of enjoying the ordinances in that church; and it is upon the ground of their being members of the church catholic, that they have a claim to the privileges of it in any church where Providence may order their lot.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, excommunication passed on just grounds by the elders of a particular church, secludes from privileges in every part of the church catholic. In like manner, ministers stand in a primary relation to the whole church; and though it be highly necessary for the more profitable exercise of their ministry that they have a particular charge, yet they are bound to exercise their ministry in any part of the church where they can have a regular opportunity of it, and the people are bound to receive and submit to it.

In opposition to all this, some insist that there is no

<sup>1</sup> This, with other observations of a similar nature, is to be understood of the church as it ought to be, according to the rule of the word, as one in profession and communion, and not of the degenerate and divided state in which it at present appears.

such thing as a catholic visible church, and that it can have no existence but in the imagination. They admit that men may “collect in idea all the professors of Christianity throughout the world, and may express that idea by the term *Catholic Visible Church* ;” “but,” say they, “how can it be called a *visible* church, unless it were visibly united as such? Where does it assemble as one visible body to hold communion in the Lord’s Supper, or in any other church ordinance? Nay, where is it united under visible ecclesiastical government and discipline?” But this objection is no way formidable. All Christians throughout the world may be one visible church though no man has seen them all; and the union of the body is both visible and actually seen, although no man can actually see all the members of the body to which the union extends. Will any man allege that the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland do not constitute one visible kingdom, because he cannot actually see them all, nor collect them otherwise than in idea? In like manner, it is a groundless supposition that there can be no visible union among the members of the catholic church, unless we could find a place where they all may and do assemble for holding communion in the ordinances of worship. The union that is among Christians, from which they are denominated one church, is not of a local nature. It is not a union measured and defined by the walls of a house, or by a particular spot of ground. It is of a much higher nature. All the members of the church catholic acting suitably to their character, have communion as one body in the Lord’s

Supper and in other ordinances of worship as well as of government, although these ordinances be dispensed in different places and by different persons. And this communion is visible. We may see it here, and we may see it there, just as we may see in different places of a kingdom, an administration of the same laws and subjection to them, and may thereby be satisfied of its unity.

What we have now said in reference to the unity of the church, clearly exhibits the great evil of schism, and of groundless separation. It is a rending and breaking of the body of Christ. The Church of Christ should be of one faith, and of one communion, and would in reality be so if the rule of the word were observed. A separate church-state and separate communion should never be set up, except when faithfulness to Christ absolutely requires it. Christians may be shut up to make a separation from a particular church by her degeneracy, by her obstinacy in a course of defection, or by her attempting to impose upon them sinful terms of communion; and being thus obliged to separate, they are not to neglect the privileges and duties of the church-state, but are to take measures for having the ordinances of Christ dispensed among them according to his appointment. In this case, the blame of separation lies upon those who depart from the rule of the word. But, for people to separate wantonly, and on trivial grounds, from a particular church with which they have been in communion, and to set up a separate church-state in opposition to it, is highly criminal. And it is a strong presumption

that their separation is groundless, or that they have not made it on a proper ground, when they can occasionally hold communion with that church from which they have separated.

Another thing deducible from the doctrine now advanced as to the unity of the visible church, is the obligation which Christians are under to hold communion with each other, not only in the same ordinances, but in the same acts of worship, as far as it is practicable, and may consist with the ends of edification. It is not essential to the union and communion of the church, that all the members meet in the same place, and join in the same acts of worship ; but it is highly expedient that this be done as far as the ends of edification will admit. People must not be divided into different congregations when they can attend upon, and enjoy, the ordinances equally well in one congregation. And when, on account of their distance or number, such a division becomes necessary, they should, nevertheless, be careful to improve all opportunities of occasional communion in the same acts of worship with those of other congregations, and particularly in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is, indeed, a real communion among Christians in this ordinance, though some of them communicate in one place, and some in another ; but the communion is more striking and observable when members of different congregations sit down together at the same table. When persons can attain to this in a neighbouring congregation almost as easily as in their own, they should by no means neglect it ; and matters should be so ordered as to afford them oppor-

tunities of this, in order, among other things, to impress more forcibly upon their minds the unity of the catholic church, and to promote enlarged views of church-communion.

From the unity of the Catholic church, we may also argue the warrantableness and propriety of extending communion in acts of government as well as of worship beyond the limits of a particular congregation. Office-bearers stand in a primary relation to the church catholic, and though they have a particular charge to which their ministrations are statedly applied, yet they are bound to promote the edification of the church in general, and should associate with the office-bearers of different congregations for a joint inspection of the whole as far as they have opportunity of being useful in that way. And it is the duty of the people to submit to them in the Lord, when employed in the exercise of government and discipline, as well as in the ministry of the Word, and other ordinances of worship.

In short, this doctrine of the unity of the Catholic church is of great practical importance, and illustrates the obligation of all church members to ENDEAVOUR TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE.

ESSAY III.<sup>1</sup>THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH DURING THE  
PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION.

In a former paper, some account has been given of the New Testament Church, as it is external and visible; and in another some illustration of its unity as one body, comprehending all that profess the religion of Jesus Christ. It is now proposed to take some view of the Old Testament Church.

As the peculiar covenant made with Israel at Sinai is in Scripture called the Old Covenant, or Testament, so the name of the Old Testament Church has been frequently appropriated to the church of Israel under that peculiar covenant. But as that covenant did not materially differ either in its promises, or in the system of worship belonging to it, from what formerly obtained, we may apply the term the "Old Testament," to the whole economy of grace that existed before the coming of Christ, and the term "Old Testament Church" to every state of the church under that economy, although, as there were variations of the economy of grace during that period, there were likewise considerable differences in the state and condition of the church.

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. 234.



In every age, God has an elect people, and, as in all ages since the fall of man, a revelation of grace has been maintained in the world, so in all ages God has had a church making a profession of his name, and worshipping him in the way of his institution. He had a church in the age before the flood. The revelation of grace commenced early after the fall. The grace of God to sinners of mankind seems to have been first intimated in the way of pronouncing a curse upon the serpent;<sup>1</sup> but the revelation then made was very important and comfortable. It was a summary of the whole Gospel of grace, and all succeeding revelations were a development of what was wrapt up in that first intimation of grace. It intimated that Christ, "the seed of the woman," would bruise the head and break the power of Satan, that old serpent; and that this great victory would be accomplished by his own suffering in our nature; for the serpent was to "bruise his heel." There were, no doubt, other instances of divine revelation in that period, and explanations of the great mystery of grace contained in the first revelation. Adam was a prophet, and lived above three hundred years with Enoch, and nearly sixty with Lamech, the father of Noah, who were also prophets; and Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Thus, by means of three persons, there was a continued ministry of grace to the church during all the period before the flood.

In this period there was also a system of instituted worship, corresponding with the revelation of grace then

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 15.

granted to the church. There was early an oblation of bloody sacrifices. Many have supposed, on very probable grounds, that the skins with which God made garments to our first parents, were furnished by the beasts which they offered in sacrifice to God ; but it is not supposable that such a service would ever have entered into their minds, if God had not taught them. And this mode of covering may have been designed as a type of the protection and covering which we have by the righteousness of Christ, the great atoning sacrifice. At any rate, we are assured that Abel offered a bloody sacrifice, and was, through faith, accepted in that service ; but there could have been no such acceptance, nor could he have offered in faith, unless it had been of divine institution.

Now as there was, in this period, an external dispensation of God's covenant, a revelation of grace, and a system of worship instituted corresponding with it, so there was also an external and visible church. The people who received that revelation, and who practised that worship, were as justly entitled to the name of church-members, as those who now receive the revelation of grace, and observe the ordinances of Gospel worship. That our first parents received the revelation which was given to them, and observed the worship enjoined upon them, there is every reason to believe ; and there are others of that period, celebrated for their faith, and for the profession which they made of it, such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah. The church was also then separated and distinguished from the world. For a time, indeed, the church erected in the family of Adam, seems to have comprehended the whole race of mankind then in ex-

istence. Cain himself was a worshipper of God and a member of the church, till he discovered his wicked character by a cruel murder and persecution of the righteous ; when God himself separated him from it by his curse. In a short time, the greater part of mankind discovered themselves to be, like Cain, the children of the wicked one ; but still God preserved to himself a church, the members of which were distinguished from the world by their privileges, their profession, and their designation.

The members of the church were distinguished from the rest of the world by their *privileges*. As we have already observed, they were favoured with a dispensation of grace, and ordinances of worship. There is also reason to think, that they enjoyed some particular emblem and token of the divine presence among them. For Cain, when God pronounced the curse upon him, complains of his being “ hid from the face ”<sup>1</sup> or *presence* of God ; and it is added in a following verse, that he “ went out from the *presence* of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> Now, this could not mean God’s essential presence, for that extends through all the earth, and all creation ; it must therefore, respect such presence as was of a more peculiar nature, and most likely has a respect to some token of his presence granted to his church. It is the opinion of some, that what is said in Genesis, iii. 24, has a reference to something of this kind. “ And he placed in the east of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. iv. 16.

We know that the cherubim were one of the special tokens of God's presence in the ancient sanctuary. The God of the church is described as "dwelling between the cherubim,"<sup>1</sup> and the word used concerning them in Genesis, when it is said that "he placed," literally, *he caused to dwell*, "on the east of the garden of Eden," is the same that is used to express God's dwelling in the sanctuary. It is also observable, that when Moses is directed about making cherubim for the sanctuary, they are spoken of as already known, for there is no direction given about their form and figure, any further than that they were to have wings. The cherubim mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis, were attended with a flaming sword, turning itself to guard the way of the tree of life; hence it has been supposed, that the only design of the cherubim was to prevent man from making any attempt to get at the tree of life, to which he had now no right. But there is no inconsistency in supposing that the flaming sword might serve to deter man from seeking relief by the covenant of works; and admitting, at the same time, that the cherubim might serve to direct his attention to the grace of another covenant, just as the covenant given at Sinai was adapted to serve both these purposes.

The members of the church were also in that period distinguished from the world by their profession and *conversation*. That they acknowledged and worshipped the true God, we have already seen; but they were likewise distinguished by their conversation. It is true, there came to be a great degeneracy in the church as

<sup>1</sup> Psalm, lxxx. 1.

well as in the world, but there were some characters eminent for holiness. Enoch walked with God; Noah was "a just man, and perfect," that is, upright in his generation; and both of them received singular testimonies of the divine approbation.

It may be added, that the members of the church were also distinguished from the men of the world by a particular *designation*. It is said (Gen. iv. 26), that at the time of the birth of Enos, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord," or, they began to be called by the name of the Lord. Men, doubtless, before this, called on the name of God, but now they came to be distinguished from the accursed race by a more explicit profession, and to be known by a peculiar denomination. Hence we find the members of the church called "*the Sons of God*." The intermarriages of the sons of God with the daughters of men are mentioned (Gen. vi. 2, 4) as one great cause of that degeneracy that led to the destruction of the old world. Now, they are not called the Sons of God on account of the relation in which they stood to him as his creatures, for that was common to all men, but on account of that adoption which belongs to church-members.

The degeneracy of the old world came to a dreadful height, and prevailed almost universally. "The wickedness of man was great in the earth;"<sup>1</sup> God was provoked to destroy the world with a flood, of which he gave warning by the ministry of Noah, during one hundred and twenty years. But the warning was disregarded, the long-suffering of God was abused. The

<sup>1</sup> Gen. vi. 5.



judgment threatened was inflicted, and the whole race of mankind were cut off from the earth, except the family of Noah, consisting of eight persons, who were wonderfully preserved in the ark.

As God thus preserved a remnant of mankind for peopling the earth after the flood, so he preserved a church in the world. The family of Noah and their descendants, till they made apostasy, enjoyed the privileges of a church-state. They not only enjoyed a revelation of grace, but were favoured with a further exhibition and confirmation of God's covenant, and with particular directions about the worship of God.

They enjoyed a revelation of grace. They were not strangers to that revelation which was given to the old world, and it was not withdrawn. The ministry of Noah did not cease with the flood; he continued to be "a preacher of righteousness," even "the righteousness of faith," of which he himself was an heir.<sup>1</sup> His own and his family's salvation by means of the ark was designed, and served as a type to instruct them concerning the spiritual salvation which is by Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The worship of God was likewise maintained, and farther directions given concerning it. After coming out of the ark, Noah offered a great and solemn sacrifice of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, a certain number of these having been preserved in the ark for that purpose, besides those which were designed for stocking the earth. The acceptance of this sacrifice

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 7; 2 Pet. ii. 5.      <sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 21.



is declared in very particular terms; for it is said (Gen. viii. 21), "The Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; neither will I again smite any more every living thing as I have done." This acceptance of his sacrifice implies that Noah proceeded in it by special direction from God. At this time, also, a strict prohibition is entered against the eating of blood,<sup>1</sup> because thereby atonement was made.

God was also pleased to favour his church at this time with a farther exhibition and confirmation of his covenant. This was, in its external form and appearance, a covenant securing the world from destruction in future by another flood, but under this was included the covenant of grace established with the church, and the spiritual salvation thereby secured. And this is evident, not only from the typical nature of the deliverance by the ark, but also from the allusion which is made in the book of Revelation to the rainbow, which was appointed to be the sign of confirmation in the covenant made with Noah. "A rainbow round about the throne" was the emblem, which intimated that all the dispensations of God towards his church are in pursuance of his covenant, and accordant with his covenant character.<sup>2</sup>

But it was not long that the whole race of mankind remained within the pale of the church. Noah, in the name of the Lord, pronounced a curse upon Canaan, the son of Ham, which amounted to an excommunica-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. ix. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. iv. 3.

tion; and it is likely that Ham was included in it as a partner with his son in impiety. At the same time that Noah pronounced the curse upon Canaan, he intimates the blessing of Shem, and speaks of God as standing in a covenant relation to him (Gen. ix. 26.) “And he said, blessed be the Lord God of Shem.” This not only intimates that Shem was blessed with a covenant relation to God, and the privilege of the church-state, but is a prophetic declaration that the church would be continued among his posterity; for both the blessing and the curse respect not merely the persons mentioned, but also their descendants. And this prophetic declaration about the posterity of the sons of Noah is carried forward in these words,—“And God shall enlarge Japhet, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.”<sup>1</sup> What is said in this passage concerning Japhet, is generally considered as a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles, upon the rejection of the Jews; and hitherto the church has been almost confined to Japhet’s posterity. But the words may be otherwise explained, as intimating an early distinction between the children of Shem and the children of Japhet. “God shall enlarge Japhet, but he (God) shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” According to this view, they point out a large earthly blessing to the former, and the privilege of the church-state to the latter, in respect of God’s dwelling (as in a tabernacle) among them.

The apostasy of the generations of mankind, after

<sup>1</sup> Gen. ix. 27.

the flood, made a very rapid and extensive progress. While Noah was yet alive, great corruption prevailed, and that even among the posterity of Shem. Abraham, along with his father's family, was an idolater ; and the children of Israel are told by Joshua that their " fathers served other gods that were on the other side of the flood,"<sup>1</sup> that is, beyond Euphrates, in the land of Chaldea. Doubtless the Lord preserved a remnant of true worshippers, such as Melchisedec, who was a priest of the Most High God, and an eminent type of Christ ; but apostasy had made great progress, and the church consisted of a number of scattered families and individuals. In this state it was more exposed to the hurtful influence of the world.

In order, therefore, to preserve the church, and to secure her more effectually from the hurtful influence of a wicked world, as well as to prepare for a more glorious state of the church under the New Testament, God was pleased to introduce a new state of matters. The church was now to be farther separated from the world, and that even in respect of local situation. It was to be brought into a more collected and organized state, under a more eminent revelation of grace, and a more particular system of worship. Abraham was the person chosen, with whom this new establishment was to commence, and among his posterity, by Isaac and Jacob, it was to be maintained, till the coming of Christ and the erection of the New Testament church. Abraham was called of God, and enjoined to

<sup>1</sup> Joshua, xxiv. 15.

leave his country and his own kindred, and to go into the land of Canaan, where God in due time was to place his church. The covenant of grace was established with Abraham, under a more full and explicit revelation of it, and with eminent solemnities of confirmation. Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, is pointed out as the head of that covenant, with whom it is primarily established, and “as the seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.” And although there was a temporal inheritance secured to the natural seed of Abraham, as a type of the heavenly which belongs to the spiritual seed, this covenant, as to its substance and principal matter, is the same with that now exhibited to us in the Gospel. The blessings therein promised to Abraham, are the same as those in which believing Gentiles are interested.<sup>1</sup> This covenant was established with Abraham by very eminent solemnities of confirmation. It was confirmed by solemn sacrifice, by the oath of God, and by the ordinance of circumcision ; and all this had a respect to Christ as that seed of Abraham, through whom the promises of the covenant were to be accomplished. And this covenant was renewed, or further established, with Isaac and Jacob, as an intimation that its administration and the church privileges connected with it, were secured to the posterity of Abraham through these descendants.

Thus in the call of Abraham, and in the covenant made with him, there was laid the foundation of what

<sup>1</sup> Galat. iii. 14.

may be strictly and properly called THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH. That church was not, indeed, formally constituted till about four hundred years after, when the law was given at Mount Sinai, and a regular system of worship, with the various ordinances of that church-state, was established; yet now in the covenant made with Abraham, the foundation was laid, and the Lord was gradually providing and preparing a people for that particular church-state, which he had determined to erect in due time. Just as in the ministry of John the Baptist, and in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the foundation was laid, and preparation was made, for the erection of the New Testament church, which yet was not formally constituted till the effusion of the spirit on the day of Pentecost, a short time after Christ's ascension into heaven.

The Old Testament church has been, and still is, a subject of great controversy. The very existence of a church-state among the children of Israel is by some denied; and all that is admitted in the place of it, is some kind of a worldly kingdom typical of the New Testament church. By others, though the name of a church is admitted, it is so explained away into a typical meaning, that there is little or nothing left of a real visible church. It is, therefore, necessary to consider this subject more particularly, and to shew that there was a real visible church, composed of the families of Israel, which, notwithstanding some peculiarities, was for substance the same church which now exists under the New Testament. But this part of the subject must be reserved to a future Essay.



ESSAY IV.<sup>1</sup>

THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH UNDER THE  
ABRAHAMIC COVENANT.

THE call of Abraham was a very remarkable era to the church, and the covenant made with him was a most important dispensation. It was a rule of faith to the church of old, and being materially the same with the Gospel covenant, it deserves our attention still. Some thoughts are here offered upon that covenant, for this among other reasons, to turn the attention of those who have more abilities and leisure to a more full consideration of the subject.

The purpose of God to erect a church in the family of Abraham, separated from the world, and to preserve it among his posterity, while the rest of the world were sunk in great corruption and wickedness, appears to have been the reason and the occasion of this covenant. There was a church before the flood, founded in the revelation of grace which then obtained, but it was almost extinguished by the universal wickedness of the old world. There was a restoration of the church in the family of Noah, under a more eminent revelation

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. i. 405.



of grace, and establishment of God's covenant with him and his family ; but apostasy from the covenant, and from the worship of the true God, soon became very prevalent ; so that in the time of Abraham the church consisted of a few scattered families and individuals. That the church might be preserved, God saw meet to have it more separated from the world, and erected in one family, and among one people, under such a revelation of grace and administration of such ordinances as he saw necessary for its preservation. For these ends he, in his sovereign pleasure, made choice of Abraham, called him, and established his covenant with him.

This covenant was exhibited to Abraham, and established with him at various times, in various promises, and with various instances of confirmation. The first account that we have of it is in the promise made to Abraham when he was called, Genesis xii. 1—3. “ And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great ; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee ; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” There was another appearance to Abraham, and a further revelation of the covenant, after he came into the land of Canaan ; Genesis xii. 7. “ And the Lord appeared unto Abraham, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land : and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.” Another appearance is recorded, Genesis, xiii. 14—16, where the promise is renewed of giving that land to his seed for ever, along with a promise of a great multiplication of his seed, even as the dust of the earth,

which cannot be numbered. A very remarkable exhibition and confirmation of this covenant is recorded, Genesis, xv., which is introduced with a most comfortable declaration,—“ Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” It is unnecessary to quote all the passage ; suffice it to observe, that the covenant was exhibited and explained more particularly, and confirmed by a very solemn sacrifice ; for the particulars of which the reader may consult his Bible.

There was, again, another appearance of God to Abraham, and an establishment of this covenant with him, when circumcision was appointed as the seal and token of it. Of this we have a large account, Genesis, xvii. The substance of the covenant is declared, verse 7, 8—“ And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant ; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession ; and I will be their God.” This covenant was again established with Abraham by the oath of God, after that great trial of his faith in offering Isaac, Genesis, xxii. 16–18. And on this occasion it was further explained, verse 18—“ And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” or, shall bless themselves, referring evidently to that faith in Christ which the nations would be brought to in due time. From the account given of this covenant in these passages, the following things may be observed.

1. This was altogether a covenant of *promise*. It was all laid out to Abraham in absolute promises. There were, no doubt, duties enjoined, which were especially incumbent on him in consequence of God's promises. But these duties are by no means to be considered as conditions, or as stipulations, on the part of Abraham, upon the performance of which he was to obtain the blessings promised ; for all the promises run in the most absolute terms, and declare what God would do according to his sovereign pleasure.

2. This covenant was no other, in the principal matter and substance of it, than that *covenant of grace* which is exhibited to us *in the Gospel*, though it was established with Abraham in such a way as was suited to the then state of the church, and partly exhibited under the promise of earthly things, as typical of things spiritual and heavenly. A small attention to the promises of it may serve to make this evident. (1.) Here is a promise of Christ, and of the benefit of his mediation. It is Christ, in whom all the nations of the earth would bless themselves ; and he is promised as the seed of Abraham, which refers to his incarnation, and his mediation in an humbled state. What measure of knowledge Abraham might have of that mystery we cannot tell. Some instruction about it he had by the sacrifices that had been appointed and offered ; by the faith of God's promise about that matter he was justified ; and the Apostle shews, that he and all believers are justified in the same way, and on the same ground.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv.

(2.) A leading promise of this covenant was, that God would be his God, which cannot be taken in any lower sense than that promise of the new covenant in Heb. viii. 10. It is a promise that God would be his protection and his portion, or, as it is expressed in a passage formerly quoted,<sup>1</sup> his “shield, and exceeding great reward.” Our Lord himself explains, in Math. xxii. 31, 32, the covenant-relation intimated in this promise, as securing all the blessedness of a future state and a glorious resurrection; and it is similarly explained in Heb. xi. 16, “Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.” This manner of expression plainly intimates, that it is altogether unworthy of God, and injurious to his glory, to suppose that this promise can relate only to temporal things, or that he is called the God of any, otherwise than according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

(3.) God promised to bless Abraham, and this did not respect merely earthly and temporal blessings, but “all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle assures us that the blessing of Abraham is that which “comes upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ;” and that “they who are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”<sup>2</sup> The same thing is also evident from the Apostle’s reasoning in Heb. vi. 13, 18, where he shews, that the promise of blessing to Abraham, and the confirmation of it by the oath of God, is what we have as the ground of *our* faith and strong consolation, which

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xv. 2.<sup>2</sup> Gal. iii. 9-14

could not be if any other blessing was meant than that of the new covenant.

3. This covenant, as established with Abraham, contained various promises of *temporal blessings*, which were typical of those that were *heavenly and spiritual*: and the accomplishment of these served not only for instruction about the other promises, but as a pledge and confirmation of them. (1.) Abraham had the promise of a son by Sarah, which was accomplished, when there could have been no hope of such an event upon any natural ground. Isaac was an eminent type of Christ, as might be shewn by various particulars; and therefore his birth was like a confirmation of all the promises of the covenant. (2.) Abraham had the promise of a numerous posterity even by Isaac, besides those by his other sons; and this was a type of the great multitude of believers in all generations, who are spoken of as the spiritual seed of Abraham and children of the promise in Gal. iii. 29, and iv. 28. But though the natural posterity of Abraham sustained this typical character, we must not suppose that this was all the concern they had in that covenant, any more than we can suppose that this was all the concern that Abraham or Isaac had in it; for they also were types. (3.) There was the promise of redemption out of Egypt as typical of the spiritual redemption, and of an earthly inheritance in the land of Canaan, as a type of the heavenly. But to enter particularly into the consideration of these types does not belong to our present purpose.

4. It may also be proper here to take some view of



the *confirmation* of this covenant. It was confirmed by a very solemn sacrifice, by a significant sacrament, and by the oath of God. It was confirmed by a *very solemn sacrifice*, of which we have an account, Gen. xv. By the divine appointment, Abraham took an heifer, a she-goat and ram, each of three years old, with a turtle-dove and young pigeon. These he divided,—except the birds,—and laid the pieces over against one another. And after it “was dark, behold, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between the pieces.” This was an emblem of the divine presence, and a solemn intimation of God’s condescension to enter into covenant with Abraham; as it seems to have been a practice on some occasions, that parties entering into covenant thus pledged their faith to one another.<sup>1</sup> Further, the confirmation of the covenant by sacrifices intimates to us the respect which it had to the mediation of Christ, and that it was a covenant of peace and reconciliation, on the ground of the great atonement.

There was a confirmation of this covenant by *circumcision*. The institution of this as a standing ordinance, in all the generations of the Jewish Church, is recorded in Gen. xvii. It is declared to be the token of God’s covenant, verse 7, and is therefore called the covenant, verses 10, 12, because it was the sign and token. It has been alleged, that circumcision had a relation only to that part of the covenant that was external and typical, and was a security to the natural posterity of Abraham for the possession and

<sup>1</sup> Jerem. xxxiv. 18.



enjoyment of the land of Canaan. But the Scriptures give a different view of matters, and leave no room for limiting the design of circumcision in this manner, but represent it as having a relation to the whole of God's covenant; and it is such a sign as is well adapted to every part. It had a relation to the promise of Christ as the seed of Abraham, and who was to be, in a singular manner, an holy seed, who yet was to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. It was a confirmation of that part of the covenant which secured the continuance of the church among the natural posterity of Abraham, till Christ, the promised seed, should come, which might be another reason of fixing upon that peculiar rite, that the token of God's covenant might be in their flesh. But circumcision was appointed as a sign and token of the whole of the covenant, and especially of the principal matter and substance of it,—these spiritual promises which have been already pointed out. A summary of that covenant is given, Gen. xvii. 5–8, and the leading promise is, that he would be a God to him and to his seed. Accordingly, both in the Old Testament and in the New, circumcision is mentioned as having a respect to spiritual and heavenly blessings. In Rom. iv. 11, it is called “a seal of the righteousness of faith.” It is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as signifying the circumcision of the heart, particularly in Deut. xxx. 6. It signifies a putting away the filth of the flesh,—that guilt and corruption which is conveyed to us by natural generation, as descendants of the first Adam. Wherefore, circumcision was a sign

and seal of God's covenant, very significant and instructive, and well adapted to that state of its administration : it had a reference to the method of our ruin ; it had a reference to the method of recovery by the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ ; and it was very expressive of the benefit we have by him, both as to justification and sanctification.

Besides all this, the covenant was confirmed to Abraham in a very solemn manner, by *the oath of God*, Gen. xxii. 16. As to this, we may only refer to what the Apostle says, Heb. xii. 13–18, “ For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself.” And it is mentioned as such a confirmation of the covenant of grace, as remains still in force for the encouragement of our faith ; “ Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.”

5. It may be also necessary to consider with whom this covenant was made : *Abraham and his seed*. It was made with Abraham, and, as to the substance of it, made with him as with any other believer. It was exhibited to him in a way of promise, as it is to all the objects of the Gospel revelation ; and by faith Abraham was interested in it, just as other believers are. No doubt there was a purpose of God about the accomplishment of the promises of this covenant, and that accomplishment evidences what was his purpose ; but this covenant was not exhibited to Abraham as a mere prophecy revealing the purpose of God about future events : it was laid before him as a promise to be

believed, and into the benefit of which he was to come by faith. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."<sup>1</sup> At the same time it must be admitted, that Abraham sustained a peculiar character in this covenant transaction. He is to be considered as the ROOT of a church, which God was thus to raise, and which was to be continued for a long time among his posterity. Therefore, that covenant, containing an eminent exhibition of grace which was to be the rule of faith to that church as well as the rule of divine administration to her, was made with Abraham, as the root and beginning thereof. It was also peculiar to Abraham, that, by this covenant, he was constituted a kind of representative of all believers. He was made a father of many nations, which, as the Apostle explains it, means that he was the father of those who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles. In what sense he was so, will be considered in taking notice of the seed that is here meant.

The covenant was made with Abraham and his *seed*, Gen xvii. 7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." Now, (1.) There is a principal respect to *Christ*, as the seed here meant, to whom the promise was made and confirmed. He was not only the seed who was promised, but the seed who was the principal object of the promise in his public character as a covenant-head; and it was to him especially that the covenant was confirmed. Gal. iii. 17,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 3.

“ The covenant was before confirmed of God to Christ,” for so the original term should be rendered. It was made with him from eternity, and “ grace was given us in Christ, and eternal life promised, before the world began.”<sup>1</sup> But it was confirmed to him for our sakes, when made with Abraham and his seed, “ which is Christ.” And when he came into the world as a member of that church which was under the administration of this covenant, he had the benefit of the promise ; but it was upon the ground of his being made under the law, and fulfilling the condition, Rom. xv. 8, “ He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.”

(2.) All true *believers* are included in this seed of Abraham, for he is called the father of all who believe, and they are all interested in that covenant. This does not mean that Abraham was a covenant-head to believers, as Adam was to his posterity, or as Christ is to the elect, so as his faith should be imputed to them for justification and life ; they are interested in righteousness and life by their own faith, and not by his.<sup>2</sup> Neither does it only mean, that in him they had a pattern of faith, and of the method of interest in God’s covenant ; for, in this sense, Abel, Enoch, and others, might get the same name. But they are called the seed of Abraham, because all their existence as believers is by the promise of that covenant that was so eminently exhibited to Abraham, and confirmed with him ; for they, “ as Isaac was, are children of promise.”<sup>3</sup> It may be

<sup>1</sup> 2. Tim. i. 9 ; Tit. i. 2.    <sup>2</sup> Rom. iv. 24.    <sup>3</sup> Gal. iv. 28.

added, that the special ground of their relation to Abraham as their father, is their relation to Christ, as being his seed, yea, members of his mystical body, Gal. iii. 29, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

(3.) It remains to consider the respect had in this covenant to the *natural* seed of Abraham. It is plain that the covenant respects that seed, some of whom were to have the land of Canaan for a possession : and it is no less evident, that their concern in that covenant was a great deal more than to sustain a typical character, and to enjoy a typical inheritance.<sup>1</sup> God is not a God to any but according to the import and tenor of the covenant of grace ; though there may be a great difference between what people really are in the sight of God, and the account that the church is to make of them. But, as by that covenant a distinction was made among the natural posterity of Abraham, it is necessary to consider what was common and applicable to all his seed, and what was peculiar and limited to some of them.

The covenant, in the great and leading promise of it, extended to all his immediate posterity, to Ishmael and the sons of Keturah. They were, accordingly, circumcised, and had in their flesh the token of God's covenant ; nor did they become aliens to it but by their own rejection of it, particularly by their neglect of circumcision. To examine what interest children have in God's covenant through their parents, will occupy

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xvii. 8.



our attention in a subsequent Essay. It may be sufficient to observe here, that there was nothing peculiar in this form in which the covenant was made with Abraham and with his seed. It is in this form that it has always been exhibited. Thus, it was exhibited to Noah and his sons, Gen. ix. 9; to all the church of Israel, Deut. xxx. 6; to strangers who might wish to be incorporated with the church of Israel, Exod. xii. 48. And the promise of the covenant is declared to be objectively of the same extent in New Testament times, Acts. ii. 39.

There was in Abraham's covenant something of a peculiar nature, that was limited to his seed by Isaac, and by Jacob his grandson. There were typical promises, such as that of the inheritance in Canaan, which were restricted to Isaac and his posterity, as types of Christ and his spiritual seed. It was also a peculiarity of this covenant, that God engaged in it to preserve the posterity of Abraham in the church-state to many generations, even till Christ should come into that church as the promised seed. Yea, some account is still made of that covenant, on behalf of the natural seed of Abraham; for the Apostle shews, Rom. xi. 28, 29, that the future ingathering of that people is thereby secured. Now, this security for their continuance in a church-state for many generations was limited to them who were to have the inheritance in Canaan, as there only the privileges of the church could be fully enjoyed; and, on account of this limitation, the covenant was renewed with Isaac, with Jacob, and with the church of Israel. This engagement, however, to con-



tinue the church in that line, was not a positive exclusion of others : Ishmael and Esau fell off from God's covenant and the privileges of the church, by their own apostasy ; the one was cast out as a persecutor, and the other profanely sold his birthright. Nor did it exclude or prevent others who were not of Jacob's posterity from joining themselves to God's covenant ; some of the Kenites, (Judges. iv. 11), and various strangers, came to be incorporated with the church of Israel on the footing of this covenant ; while, on the other hand, many of the seed of Jacob rejected it, and were mingled with the heathen.

These observations are offered as some illustration of that covenant to which there is so much reference in Scripture. It is always referred to as the grand rule of divine administration to the church, and as the rule and ground of the church's faith. Notwithstanding much provocation, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, and brought salvation to his people for his name's sake : And in all their straits they had recourse to it as their grand plea. By a name taken from this covenant, viz., the GOD OF ABRAHAM, he exhibited himself in his gracious character, and as an object of faith. Exod. iii. 15, " Thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you : This is MY NAME FOR EVER, and this is MY MEMORIAL unto all generations." And in this covenant-name did the church place her confidence, Isaiah. xxvi. 8, " The desire of our soul is to thy name, and thy memorial." Yea, it is still

according to this covenant, divested of its typical appendages, that God reveals his gracious character, and proceeds in his gracious administration to the church : “ For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts : and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heb. viii. 10.

ESSAY V.<sup>1</sup>

## THE SINAITIC COVENANT.

To observe the dawn of the day of grace, and the progress of God's dispensations towards his church, is both pleasant and profitable. At sundry times and in divers manners, God spake in times past unto the fathers, as preparatory unto his speaking to us by his Son. Some observations upon a very interesting dispensation, viz., the Abrahamic covenant, have already been presented to the public; and this was done with the view of proceeding to the consideration of another very important dispensation, viz., the covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai. There is a great deal of reference to this covenant in the New Testament Scriptures, and in many passages the Gospel is illustrated, sometimes in the way of contrasting, and sometimes in the way of comparing it with that old covenant; so that a right understanding of these passages must be greatly promoted by just views of it.

In order to ascertain more clearly the nature of the Sinai covenant, it may be necessary, in the first place,

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. iv. 481.

to examine and set aside some mistaken notions which have been entertained respecting it. By some it has been represented as a covenant merely political and typical. Some speak of it as typical only ; and others consider it as political also. The arguments used in support of these opinions are nearly the same ; but it may be proper to consider, separately, what is advanced in support of its political nature, and what is urged in proof of its being merely external and typical.

1. In support of the notion, that the covenant at Sinai was political or civil, we are told, that the government of the Jewish nation was a Theocracy ;<sup>1</sup> that God sustained the character of supreme civil magistrate to that people, and, “ as such, disposed of offices, made war and peace, exacted tribute, enacted laws, punished with death such of that people as refused him allegiance, and defended his subjects from their enemies ;” and that the Sinai covenant was established as a civil constitution with the nation of Israel, requiring of them external obedience to God as their king, and, on condition of this, securing to them a peaceable possession of their inheritances in Canaan.

To examine all the particulars which have been adduced in confirmation of these sentiments, would far exceed the proper limits of an Essay. Many peculiarities of the Jewish church and state, but utterly irrelevant for proof of the point, have been held up as affording demonstrative evidence ; and many more of the like nature might be readily produced. If the

\* <sup>1</sup> The word signifies *the government of God*.

hypothesis of such a theocracy be once adopted, a lively fancy will be at no loss to find abundance of proof, such as it is ; and in every circumstance some part or other of this pretended theocracy will be discovered. The tabernacle and temple is the King's palace ; the priests are his ministers of state ; the civil governors his captains and officers ; and the tithes are the taxes ! In the privacy of the temple, some find all the secrecy and state of an eastern monarch ; while others, perhaps, in the division of the land of Canaan among the warriors, will be at no loss to trace the peculiarities of the feudal system, and the holding under a lord superior ! *Apage nugas.*

It is necessary, however, to take some notice of this theocracy, to which almost every thing among the Israelites is referred. It is a convenient term, and is made use of sometimes to account for every peculiarity in the ancient state of matters ; at other times it is used as a reason for rejecting every argument and example taken from the Old Testament, as if that theocracy had engrossed every ordinance and every service. According to some, no argument in behalf of infant-baptism can be taken from circumcision, which, in their opinion, was only a badge of national distinction, and a security for civil privileges. According to others, all covenanting, vowing, or swearing to the Lord, was a political Jewish service, which can have no place under the New Testament. But the existence of such a theocracy as above described should be proved, and not taken for granted.

The whole world is under one great Theocracy. "God

is king of all the earth ;” and whatever singular and peculiar exercise of divine providence there was about the nation of Israel, yet the providence of God is universal. “Sitting upon the throne of his holiness, he ruleth” all “nations.” It is degrading to the Divine Majesty to represent the great God of heaven and earth as a local deity, such as the nations supposed their gods to be, and much more to represent him as a mere temporal prince.

God had, indeed, a special and peculiar kingdom in Israel. The church was then, and is still, under a theocracy, in the strictest sense of this expression. The Lord Christ was then, and still is, the alone King, Lord, and Lawgiver in the church. But it is quite wrong to apply to the national and political state of Israel what properly belonged to the church-state. The distinction between the church and the state was real and observable, although the connection established between them was very near and intimate. Neither the various laws which God gave them relative to their political and civil state, nor the civil penalties with which their religious establishment was enforced, could abolish this distinction. Many of the religious ordinances then enjoined upon the church, were of such a nature, that they could not be observed and enjoyed but under the protection of a civil establishment. A national state and government was, therefore, erected and maintained among the Israelites for this very purpose. The possession of Canaan, and the enjoyment of their inheritances there, were, in various respects, intimately connected with their church-state, and with



the observation of religious ordinances ; hence it became necessary to appoint them various laws relative to their civil state and political concerns. But in as far as the interests of the church were not affected, the children of Israel were, as much as any other people. left at liberty to regulate their civil affairs according to the general principles of reason and morality. By this, the change of government in the days of Samuel is a sufficient evidence ; and the crime laid to their charge on that occasion, was not their renouncing the theocracy, which existed as much after as before, but their distrusting the providence of God, which had been so often and so eminently displayed in their behalf.

But whatever might be the peculiarity of the government of the Jewish nation, and by whatever name it might be called, the nature of the Sinaitic covenant is not to be thereby determined. No doubt it was in some measure connected with the civil establishment of the nation, as was every other religious institution. It comprehended all the laws given by God to Israel, moral, ceremonial, and also what are called judicial. But this did not make it a mere political constitution. It was not made with Israel *as a nation*, but with them *as a church* ; and in making it with them, God did not sustain the character of *the King of the nation*, or supreme civil head, but acted as *the God and Redeemer of his church*. Exod. xx. 2, “ I am *the Lord thy God*, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” That this covenant was made with the church, and not with the nation of Israel, is evident from the reasoning of the

Apostle concerning it in the third and fourth chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians. In the third chapter, he speaks of it as a schoolmaster, which the church was under till Christ came, and which she is not under now when he is come.<sup>1</sup> And the church is redeemed from it and from its curse. But this is not the privilege of the Jewish nation. The national state of the Jews is quite abolished, and the great body of that people are lying under the curse of that covenant to this day. In like manner, in chapter fourth, the Apostle represents those under that covenant as an heir in a state of childhood, who is under tutors and governors, though he be the Lord of all; but when this heir passes from childhood to manhood, he is no longer in that state of bondage. Now, this applies with great propriety to the church in respect to its subjection to the Sinaitic covenant before the coming of Christ, and its freedom from it afterwards; but it will by no means apply to the Jewish nation as such, which was great and flourishing at certain times when that covenant subsisted; while now it is abolished, and the body of that people, instead of being acknowledged as heirs, and admitted to greater enjoyments than formerly, are cast out as bondmen.

Now, as this covenant was made with Israel as a church, it is absurd to suppose that God, in making it with them, acted in the character of a temporal prince. In all his dealings with the church he sustains a character infinitely superior, and acts in a very different

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 24, 25.

relation. In this covenant he did not exhibit himself as their supreme civil magistrate, and as an object of civil homage, but he exhibited himself as THE LORD THEIR GOD, the object of their dependence for all good, and of all their religious worship. This was not a relation which commenced with the Sinaitic covenant, or which was constituted by it, but subsisted previously to it. Moses was commissioned to declare this relation to Israel in Egypt at his first interview;<sup>1</sup> and he declared to Pharaoh, that God stood in this relation to that people.<sup>2</sup> And it is the very same character in which God exhibited himself in the covenant with Abraham, and the very same relation in which he stood to the fathers in consequence of this covenant.<sup>3</sup> There is not the least ground to suppose that this covenant-name meant one thing in reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that it meant a very different thing when revealed to Israel at Mount Sinai. That it intimated something infinitely beyond a mere temporal relation, and secured much more than earthly blessings, was proved by our Lord to the confusion of the Sadducees, in these words, “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”<sup>4</sup>

In opposition to this, the character of the great body of Israel is held up as precluding the supposition of

<sup>1</sup> Exod. vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Exod. vii. 16; ix. 1, 13; x. 3, &c.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. vi. 3, 4, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Matth. xxii. 31, 32.

their being acknowledged as a church, or of God's standing in such a relation to them as is here stated. But the Spirit of God by Stephen expressly calls them a church, Acts. vii. 38, "This is he that was *in the church* in the wilderness, with the Angel that spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers ; who received the lively oracles to give unto us." And are we wiser than he ? or shall we presume to dispute the title that he gives them ? The state of individuals before God does not come under the cognizance of man. Neither can any man determine what degree of ignorance or sin may consist with a gracious state. Many of them acted very unsuitably to their profession and privileges, as many church members still do ; and the difference of character then and now, is not greater than the difference of the means of improvement. At any rate, provision was made of a method of professing their repentance, and making satisfaction to the church for their offences : Means also were appointed for ridding the church of atrocious, presumptuous, and obstinate offenders. How this covenant could consist with their character as church members, and with the relation in which God stood to them as such, falls to be afterwards considered.

It is farther contended, that in this covenant the obedience required and the blessings promised were only external ; and this is urged as a proof that the covenant was only political ; because a temporal monarch claims from his subjects only outward honour and obedience, and bestows on them only temporal rewards. But, supposing the fact to be as is alleged, it would not

prove the point for which it is adduced. Internal respect and reverence is due to magistrates by the law of God, as well as external honour. And though the judgment of men cannot extend to the inward principles, otherwise than as they are discovered by the outward conduct, yet, in as far as they are thus discovered, they come under the judgment of human laws. And it is not the mere outward act, but the *malus animus*, or evil intention, which makes a person criminal even in the eye of civil law. It is, however, a groundless supposition, that the obedience required, and the blessings referred to, were merely external, as may be shewn by considering the other opinion about this covenant formerly mentioned.

II. There are others who represent the Sinaitic covenant as being merely typical, and as having a respect only to things temporal and external. They tell us, that it was a covenant about the possession of the land of Canaan, a covenant in which that earthly inheritance, with a great measure of temporal happiness, was pronounced to the people of Israel, upon condition of external obedience to the law ; and that, on the other hand, the penalty in case of disobedience was a forfeiture of the land of Canaan, with all manner of outward calamity and temporal evil. But this view of the Sinaitic covenant accords as little with the Scripture account of it, as that which has been already considered. It is almost in every particular contradictory to it, as will appear by a very brief examination.

This covenant was, no doubt, in some respects typical. It had a respect to the typical system, as



every thing then had, and it had a relation to temporal things, as typical of good things to come. But this is no reason for calling it *merely* typical, any more than it would be for saying that the covenant with Abraham was so, which had fully as much relation to things external and typical. Both of them had a reference to earthly and temporal blessings, but not to such only ; and there is no ground to allege that temporal blessings only were promised in the one more than in the other. The propriety, however, of using the word *promise* in reference to the Sinaitic covenant, or how far it may be admitted that there was in it properly a promise of any blessing, temporal or eternal, depends on the view which is taken of it. Viewed as a continuation of, or as in connection with, the Abrahamic covenant, all the promises of that covenant were incorporated with it ; but, viewing it as distinguished and separated from the Abrahamic covenant, and as a law of works, it did not, and could not, properly promise any blessing to sinners ; though it might refer to blessings, in the way of stating the connection between them and perfect obedience to the law.<sup>1</sup>

But whatever kind of reference this covenant had to blessings, whether in a way of promise or otherwise, or in whatever way they were to be obtained, the blessings referred to were not merely temporal and earthly. Temporal blessings were, indeed, most frequently mentioned, and perhaps most insisted on, agreeable to the typical nature of the dispensation, and

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xviii. 5 ; Luke. x. 28 ; Rom. x. 5.



the infant state of the church, as children are taught and encouraged by sensible objects. But spiritual and eternal blessings were also really exhibited, although less clearly and more sparingly. The whole typical system which was engrossed into this covenant exhibited to their faith the method of salvation, with all the blessings of the new covenant. The love and favour of God, which is infinitely above all earthly good, was the great and leading blessing exhibited to them.<sup>1</sup> And the covenant-relation in which God stood to them extended to a future state, and secured the blessedness of it.<sup>2</sup> It is to no purpose to plead in opposition to this, that the promise of God's favour and other spiritual blessings belonged to the Abrahamic and not to the Sinaitic covenant; for this last had properly no other promises, temporal or spiritual, except those of the former. If, on the other hand, we view the Sinaitic covenant as separated from the Abrahamic, and as exhibiting life and death, the blessing and the curse, according to the terms of the law of works, yet neither blessing nor curse is to be viewed as merely external. The blessing stated, which the carnal Jews foolishly expected by the works of the law, was not merely temporal life and prosperity in the land of Canaan, but justification before God and eternal life.<sup>3</sup> In like manner, the curse denounced in that covenant as a law of works, did not extend merely to temporal evil, but to all that which is the desert of sin, and from which Christ hath redeemed his people.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Deut. vii. 8, 13; xxiii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Matth. xix. 16; Rom. x. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Matth. xxii. 31, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. iii. 13.

The notion that the Sinaitic covenant required only external obedience is no less contrary to Scripture, and is also injurious to the purity and perfection of God's law. The obedience required was no less than perfect, both internal and external ; and that in whatever light it be viewed, whether we consider as the service of the covenant-people, or as the condition of life according to the terms of the law of works. The law of the ten commandments, which was the principal matter of this covenant, required not merely external obedience, but the obedience of the heart, and prohibited all heart-sin, as well as outward transgression. The sum of the ten commandments is, " to love the Lord with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves." Unbelief, hatred, covetousness, and other sins of the heart, were as really forbidden as any external transgression. It is true, the external act both in the commandment and prohibition was much insisted on ; but this is easily accounted for by the then infant state of the church. The people were dealt with as we use to deal with children who are taught their duty in this manner, and told that they must not tell lies, say ill words, break the Sabbath, &c. ; yet many of them attained to clear views of the holiness, extent, and spirituality of the law, and thereby to a deep conviction of the depravity of their hearts and lives.

But some plead, that the obedience required in the Sinaitic covenant could be no more than external, because the people were incapable of any more ; and it would have been utterly inconsistent to have prescribed a condition, which was impossible to be fulfilled, or to

have required internal obedience while only external blessings were promised. But this is to argue in what is called a circle ; an attempt to prove this by that, and that by this, while both remain to be proved. That the blessings promised were not merely temporal, we have already seen ; and that they were not to be obtained on the condition of their obedience, is equally certain. That justification and eternal life were never promised to any sinner upon condition of his obedience, and never could be obtained by him on such terms, is admitted by those who contend for that view of the Sinaitic covenant which is now under consideration. It is only in so far as that covenant respected the earthly inheritance and temporal blessings that they represent the people's obedience as the condition of it. But we have seen that it was not temporal blessings only to which it referred ; and the obedience required must necessarily have the same relation to the one kind of blessings as to the other. By one and the same covenant, spiritual blessings could not be exhibited as to be obtained in the way of free grace, and temporal blessings to be obtained by works of the law. Nay, it is perfectly clear, that the inheritance of Canaan was not given them upon the condition of their obedience to the law, nor was the possession of it thereby secured. God gave it to Abraham and his seed by promise, which was confirmed by his oath. It was not consistent with the truth of God, to disannul that solemn grant by another covenant or constitution inconsistent with it. " For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise ; but God gave it to Abraham by

promise," Gal. iii. 18. It is this promise and oath which is always referred to as the reason of their getting possession of Canaan, and that in opposition to any righteousness or obedience of theirs : see particularly Deut. ix. 5. And it was this promise and oath which kept them in possession of it when their wickedness was very great, 2 Kings, xiii. 23. No doubt their transgressions exposed them to many calamities. Believers among them might suffer severe chastisement, as believers may do still ; and unbelievers might then suffer under the curse of the law, as they may now do, although externally under a dispensation of grace ; but this will not prove that either the former or the latter are put under a covenant to obtain temporal blessings by their obedience.

The righteousness of God's government was eminently manifested by a remarkable train of mercies and judgments towards the nation of Israel, corresponding with the state of matters among them ; but there is something of a similar manifestation of his holy government in his providence towards nations still. The peculiar state of the Jews required a singular exercise of providence towards them, Amos, iii. 2. They accordingly were laid under heavy calamities at different times, and their possession of Canaan was for a while interrupted by their captivity ; but it was in the meantime preserved for them, and they were restored to it. Their possession of it was secured and continued to them till that seed came, to whom the promise was made, and who, by fulfilling the law, confirmed the promises unto the fathers.

But further, if the possession of the land of Canaan had depended even upon their external obedience, they never could either have attained or retained the possession of it. The most regular among them could hardly be supposed capable of giving exact obedience to such a multitude of precepts. It has been said, that it would be a shocking absurdity to suppose God formally entering into a covenant, the condition of which could not possibly be performed. This has been advanced as a reason to prove that only external obedience was required, because any other was impossible. If we admit the assertion, we must draw a very different conclusion from it. We must conclude, not that the obedience required was merely external, but that no obedience of theirs was the condition upon which they were to enjoy the blessing. If internal and spiritual obedience was an impossible condition, an exact external obedience might well be called impracticable. In answer to this we are told, that the sacrifices expiated for the transgressions of that covenant, except in the case of presumptuous sin, and that they were appointed only for external transgressions. It is very true, that particular sacrifices were appointed for certain external transgressions. It was improper then, as well as now, to make a confession to men of all secret iniquity, and it was impracticable to offer a particular sacrifice for every sin ; yet the atonement by sacrifice had a respect to all sin, without exception, although it could not save the criminal from the penalty he incurred by certain particular crimes. The solemn expiation in the seventh month extended to “all the iniquities of the children

of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,"<sup>1</sup> Besides, it was only in a typical way that these sacrifices could make atonement for any sin, whether as a transgression of that covenant or otherwise. It is the sacrifice of Christ only which hath made real atonement for any sin; and we are expressly told, that it was thereby that the transgressions of the Sinai covenant were expiated. "And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the transgressions that were under the first Testament, they which are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."<sup>2</sup>

But we refer the further consideration of this subject to another paper.

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xvi. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. ix. 15.



## ESSAY VI.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH UNDER THE SINAITIC  
COVENANT.<sup>1</sup>

IN the preceding Essay, some different opinions about the nature of the Sinai covenant have been examined and shewn to be groundless. In opposition to those who assert that this covenant was of a political nature, or that it was merely external and typical, it has been shewn, that it was made with the church, and not with the nation of Israel as such; that God in making it did not sustain the character of a temporal prince, but acted as the Lord and lawgiver of his church; that the obedience required was not merely external; and that the blessing and the curse therein stated did not respect only temporal happiness and misery.

It is now proposed to point out the nature and design of that covenant, according to the account given of it in Scripture. But it is of such a complicated nature that it is difficult to bring all the parts of it into one view, so as that the uniformity of it, as one grand

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. iv. 534.

system, may be observed. When we consider it by parts, and take a view of these separately, they are apt to appear contradictory, and at war with one another, or with other dispensations of God towards his church; but this is not and cannot be the case, and all appearance of inconsistency proceeds only from our limited and imperfect views of the subject.

In one view, the covenant at Sinai may be considered as a continuation, or rather a repetition, of the covenant made with Abraham, with such an addition as was useful to point out the way in which that covenant was to be accomplished, and which was made subservient to the accomplishment of it. "The covenant which God made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac, the same he confirmed unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant."<sup>1</sup> Hence the covenant at Sinai was prefaced and introduced by a declaration of that name and character which arose from or was established in the Abrahamic covenant, *Exod. xx. 2*; "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." But the Sinai covenant is ordinarily spoken of in Scripture as something different from the covenant made with Abraham, and for necessary purposes added to it, *Gal. iii. 19*. It is thus distinguished from the Abrahamic covenant, but subordinated to it that it is now to be considered.

The Sinai-covenant, then, as distinguished from the Abrahamic, was just a law or covenant of works, "having a shadow of good things to come." It is in Scripture generally called the Law, and by that name

<sup>1</sup> Psalm, cv. 9, 10.

is distinguished from the former covenant, called the Promise, Galat. chap. iii. and iv. It is described and spoken of as a *law of works* in many places of Scripture, particularly in the epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians. As a law having a shadow of good things to come, the Apostle treats of it in the epistle to the Hebrews. If we look at the outward form of the Sinai covenant, we see nothing but a law of works, enjoining obedience to every precept, under the penalty of the curse; but as the whole ceremonial system was engrossed into it, thereby it gave a delineation of the method of life and salvation through the mediation of Christ, exhibiting a shadow of good things to come. But more particularly,—

The Sinai covenant is usually called the *law*, and under that name is contrasted with the promise which is now laid open in the Gospel. The law of the Ten Commandments was the substance and principal matter of this covenant, though it included also a great variety of positive precepts about ceremonial services. The Ten Commandments are called the Words of the Covenant Exod. xxxiv. 28; the tables upon which they were written are called the Tables of the Covenant, and the ark in which these tables were put, is called the Ark of the Covenant, Deut. ix. 9. In the New Testament, this covenant is usually represented as a law of works, and as such is contrasted with the Gospel or law of faith, Rom. iii. 27. The latter excludes all boasting, the former does not. It is represented as stating a method of justification and life different from that which the Gospel exhibits, and different from that which is by faith, Rom. x. 5, 6. “Moses describeth

the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth these things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith" speaketh differently, verse 6-9. "And the law is not of faith, but the man that doeth them shall live in them," Gal. iii. 12.

As a further evidence of its being a law of works, all the duties required were enjoined under the penalty of the curse, Deut. xxvii. 26, so that as many as sought justification and life thereby were necessarily under the curse, because they could not perform what was required, Gal. iii. 10. To sinners, therefore, it was *the ministration of condemnation and death*, in opposition to the Gospel, which is the ministration of the *Spirit, righteousness, and life*, 2 Cor. iii. 7, 8, 9. To sinners it could serve only the purpose of conviction and self-condemnation, by the discovery of sin, Rom. iii. 19, 20. It could not give life, Gal. iii. 21. It could not give liberty, Gal. iv. 23. And if righteousness could have been by the law, Christ is dead in vain. Gal. ii. 21. It is also called the hand-writing of ordinances which was against us and contrary to us, and which Christ hath taken out of the way, nailing it to his cross, Coloss. ii. 14. It was like a debt-bond, which sinners never could pay; but Christ, the surety, cleared the debt, got up the bond, and had it cancelled.

But besides these and various other texts, which describe the Sinai-covenant as a law of works, the external circumstances of an awful and terrible nature wherewith it was promulgated, and which filled the people with great dread and terror, are a further indication of its nature. "Mount Sinai was altogether on

a smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire : And the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly," Exod. xix. 18. There was "blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which they that heard entreated might not be spoken to them any more ; for they could not endure that which was commanded ; and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake," Heb. xii. 18-21. These awful appearances represented what sinners had to expect according to the tenor of the law of works—nothing but "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul of man that doeth evil." But though this covenant, considered by itself, was of such a nature as now stated, the church of God was not thereby brought into a state of condemnation, nor were believers left under the curse. The promise to Abraham into which this covenant was engrafted, as also the shadow it had of good things to come, exhibited to their faith relief from that wrath and curse to which, according to the tenor of this covenant, they as sinners would have been exposed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The above view of the Sinai covenant is nearly the same with that which is given in the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, and which the author shews to have corresponded with the sentiments of famous divines from the reformation and downward. It is remarkable, what clear views the reformers had of the law and of the Gospel, of justification by works and by faith, and of the difference between the two. What they found stated in the Scriptures on these points, they asserted with assurance, without troubling themselves with such speculations and reasonings as some in later times have had recourse to for removing difficulties, but which have really tended to obscure the truth.



*Is the law, then, against the promises of God?* Such is the objection which the Apostle states, Galatians, iii. 21, as what would be readily brought against his account of the law, or Sinai-covenant. The inheritance, temporal and eternal, was given to Abraham and his seed by promise, to be received and enjoyed by faith, verse 14–18; but the law stated a different method of life, and contrary to that which is by faith, verse 12. “And the law is not of faith, but the man that doth them shall live in them.” Does not this seem to intimate, that the promise is set aside, the free grant of the blessing is revoked, and another method of life introduced utterly inconsistent with the promise? “God forbid.” We must not suppose that God’s covenant of promise, solemnly confirmed, was to be altered or disannulled in that manner. “Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto,” verse 15. Surely, then, “the covenant that was confirmed before of God to Christ, the law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect,” verse 17. The covenant of promise made with Abraham could not possibly be altered or set aside by the introduction of the Sinai-covenant; and as an evidence that it was not, the latter was founded upon the former, as still in force. The law was introduced by a declaration of God’s name and character, according to the covenant of promise: “I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

The law or Sinai-covenant, indeed, taken by itself,



stated a method of life different from that which was exhibited in the promise; but it was never given with the design that sinners should obtain, or seek to obtain, life by their obedience to it; for this was altogether impossible; Gal. iii. 21. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." But this the law could not do. It could neither give the sinner life to perform obedience, nor could it justify him by any obedience that he could perform. By itself, it could be to sinners only the ministration of condemnation and death. And as the law was not introduced with the design that the people should seek or obtain life by it, so neither was the design of its introduction, to deprive them of the benefit of the promise, nor to lay and leave them under a sentence of condemnation. The law was ordained in the hand of a Mediator, Gal. iii. 19; it was dedicated by blood, Heb. ix. 18, 19, 20; it had a shadow of good things to come, Heb. x. 1; and the sacrifices pointed out relief from that curse and condemnation which their transgressions of the law deserved. These sacrifices referred them to the grace of the promise for relief against the sentence of the law, and against all that wrath to which, according to the law, they would have been exposed.

The Sinai-covenant, therefore, as thus introduced and stated, was no way hostile to the covenant made with Abraham, nor was the law contrary to the promise. It was an handmaid subservient to it, as Hagar was to Sarah, Gal. iv. 21-24. Hagar was useful

in her own place as an handmaid ; but it was not through her that the promise was to be accomplished, and it was quite wrong to put her in Sarah's place. In like manner, the Sinai-covenant was given to be an useful handmaid to the promise ; but when it was put in the place of the promise, and life and salvation sought thereby, it was quite perverted, and nothing could be expected from it but bondage under the curse, Gal. iii. 10 ; iv. 24.

*Wherefore, then, serveth the law ?* Gal. iii. 19. If the Sinai-covenant was not designed to introduce a new method of life, why was it given ? Why were such terms stated, "that the man which doeth these things should live in them," if the people were not to seek nor expect life by their obedience to the law ? Though it was never the design of giving the law, that men should seek or obtain life by their obedience to it, nor that it should set aside the promise by introducing a different method of life, it was not therefore useless, but was very subservient as an handmaid to the promise. It convinced them of sin ; it shut them up to the faith ; it was a schoolmaster to them in that infant state of the church ; and it was through the fulfilment of it, though not by them, that the promised blessing came to be obtained.

The law, or Sinai-covenant, served to convince them of sin. "It was added because of transgressions." It "concluded all under sin," Gal. iii. 19-22. "The law entered, that sin might abound," Rom. v. 20. It was not the design of the law to increase iniquity, whatever effect it may have had to irritate

the corruption of the heart, and however it may have been thereby abused. The design of the law is to repress sin and not to promote it. But, in Scripture, things are said to be, when they are manifested; and the entrance of the law manifested the abounding of sin. The precepts of the law discovered sin, and the curse pointed out the desert of it, so that to sinners it was the ministration of condemnation.

It was only from inattention and from ignorance of its nature, that any could expect life in that way. The more they knew of it, the more would they be filled with conviction and self-condemnation. For "what things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19. And that the very first revelation of that covenant had something of this effect upon the people, is evident from the dread and terror which they discovered.

This conviction and self-condemnation produced by the law was useful to "shut them up to the faith," to preclude every vain hope of righteousness and life by their own obedience, and to let them see that it was alone by faith in the free promise that this could be obtained, Gal. iii. 22, 23. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up to the faith, which should afterwards be revealed." There is in all men naturally a strong propensity to trust to some good about themselves as a recommendation to the Divine favour; and the Jews were, like

others, in danger from the influence of this corrupt principle. Many intimations were given them, that the favours bestowed on them were not procured by their righteousness, but proceeded from the sovereign pleasure and good will of God. Yet so powerful and prevalent is the attachment to self-righteousness, that a very particular and striking dispensation of the law was necessary to convince them of the folly of it, and to shew them that, if ever they obtain the favour of God, it must be in the way of free grace. Now the Sinai-covenant, by the particularity and multiplicity of its precepts, by the sanction of the curse against every transgression, and by the circumstances of terrible majesty wherewith it was introduced, was eminently adapted to produce this effect ; and it had this effect in some measure upon the children of Israel ; so that they declined to have any thing to do with it otherwise than through a mediator, and earnestly requested that Moses would interpose between God and them. This their request corresponded with the design of that covenant, and was accordingly approved of by God, who promised them a mediator, of whom Moses was only a type, Deut. xviii. 15–18. “ The Lord thy God will raise up unto you a *prophet* from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me ; unto him ye shall hearken. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, lest I die. And the Lord said unto me, they have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise up unto them a prophet

from among their brethren, like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

But the Sinai-covenant shut up to the faith, not merely as it shewed the impossibility of righteousness by the works of the law, but also as it had a shadow of good things to come, and exhibited thereby, though obscurely, that relief from the curse to which they had to betake themselves. The law was their schoolmaster unto Christ, Gal. iv. 24. It might be so called because of its burdensome service and its severe discipline. It had a multitude of precepts and prohibitions about every service. "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Threatenings and corrections abounded. It was a yoke they were not able to bear, and they had a reason to long for deliverance from it. But the law might be called a schoolmaster, especially because, by the ceremonial service which it enjoined, it taught the elements, the rudiments or first principles of the Gospel, Gal. iv. 3; Col. ii. 20.

There is another very important design for which the Sinai-covenant was appointed, and which it is necessary we should attend to. It was to be through the fulfilling of that law-covenant that the promise was to be accomplished. Not, indeed, by the obedience of the people of Israel—that was impossible—but by the obedience of the Lord Christ, the surety of sinners. Salvation comes to sinners altogether by grace in the way of free promise; but it is also in the way of having full satisfaction made to law and justice by the mediation of Christ; and the appointment of the Sinai-co-



venant as a law of works, eminently served to illustrate this method of salvation. The Abrahamic covenant was a promise of salvation to sinners. It declared that in Christ, the seed of Abraham, all families of the earth should be blessed. This the apostle calls a preaching of the Gospel before hand to the Gentiles, Gal. iii. 8. This promise respecting the salvation of sinners was made and confirmed to Christ, through whom it was to be accomplished, verses 16, 17. But that the accomplishment of it might be without prejudice to the law, or to the glory of the divine perfections, it was necessary that he should honour the law by obedience, and make atonement for the breaches of it. Accordingly the law was given to Israel in the form of a covenant of works; and in the fulness of time, when Christ came into the world, he was made under it, and he fulfilled it perfectly, Matthew, v. 17, 18; Gal. iv. 4. He fully answered all the demands of it by his obedience unto death, and at the same time fully accomplished all that was pointed out by the typical service which it enjoined.

That the giving the law in a covenant form was in order to its being fulfilled by Christ, the promised seed, was intimated to the people of Israel by different methods. As already observed, it was delivered in such a manner, that they earnestly deprecated their having any thing to do with it, otherwise than through a mediator; and however little knowledge some of them might have of that mediator, and what he was to do, their request for the intervention of a mediator was approved of God, as corresponding with his design of



giving the law. Whatever use they were to make of the law as a rule of worship and moral conduct, they could have nothing to do with it in its covenant form, without perverting it from its proper design. Of this design there was a further intimation given, by the manner in which the tables of the covenant, containing the Ten Commandments, were disposed of. They were laid up in the ark, and covered by the mercy-seat, which was from time to time sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice. This disposal of the covenant pointed out that it was to be fulfilled by Christ; that by the blood of his sacrifice an atonement would be made for the breaches of it; and that all the dispensation of mercy to sinners proceeds upon a perfect fulfilment of the law and satisfaction to divine justice.

We must not, however, suppose that the mediation of Christ had a respect only to the Sinai covenant, as such, or to that peculiar dispensation of the law which the children of Israel were under. All mankind were in Adam under a law of works, and are in their natural state, subject to the curse, on account of their breach of it in him, and also because of their actual transgressions of the law. Before the giving of the law at Sinai, mankind were under a law subjecting them to death for their transgressions: "For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, Rom. v. 13, 14. In like manner, sinners who had no concern with the peculiar dispensation of the law given to Israel, were neverthe-

less exposed to the curse ; and all in their natural state are so still, though that peculiar dispensation is abolished. It was therefore necessary that the mediation of Christ should have a respect to the law of works in every state of it, and not to that peculiar dispensation of it only ; because the benefit of his mediation was to extend to sinners of every age and every nation. And the mediation of Christ had indeed a respect to the law of works. When he fulfilled the Sinai covenant he fulfilled all righteousness ; for the law of the Ten Commandments, which was the substance of that covenant, comprehends every obligation that man can lie under, and the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, as being of infinite merit and worth.

From the preceding account of the Sinai covenant, we may learn how far, and in what respects, it is now abrogated by the coming of Christ. So far as it exhibited a shadow of good things to come, which is the view given of it in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is no longer necessary and proper. The substance is come, and we have no more use for the shadow. The law which enjoined a remembrance of sin by frequent sacrifices would now be improper, when that sacrifice is come by which it is removed ; and the same thing might be observed as to all the parts of the typical system.

In like manner, the peculiar dispensation of the law in the form of a covenant of works, which is the view in which it is considered in the Epistle to the Galatians, cannot consist with that eminent dispensation of grace which is now introduced. "The law was our schoolmaster

until Christ, that we might be justified by faith; but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a school-master." The severe discipline which is necessary for children is unsuitable to those that are grown up. But this different state of matters, before and after the coming of Christ, does not respect the condition of individuals as they are before God; but it respects the condition of the church and the external dispensation which it is under. Believers, before the coming of Christ, were not, by the Sinai covenant, laid under condemnation: They had by faith in Christ a perfect justification, notwithstanding that peculiar external dispensation of the law. On the other hand, unbelievers now, though they live under an external dispensation of the Gospel, are as really in a state of condemnation as any could be under the Sinai covenant: for the law of works, which all men are under in their natural state, is not abolished by the death of Christ, but stands in force against, and will take effect on, all that remain strangers to him. A declaration also of the terms of the law of works, in the general state thereof, and what sinners have to fear from it, is still useful to awaken and convince them of their sin and danger. But that peculiar dispensation of the law of works which was given at Sinai, is now removed; the burdensome service arising from the great multitude of positive institutions is abolished, and the clear light of the Gospel dispels the darkness and terror which must otherwise attend any dispensation of the law of works, much more such a dispensation of it as that under consideration.

From this account of the Sinai covenant we may

also learn the vanity of all the attempts of a sinner to obtain justification and life by the works of the law. If ever righteousness could be by the law, it was more likely to be by the Sinai covenant than by any other law. It prescribed obedience both moral and ceremonial, and it enjoined a great abundance of religious services ; yet it could not justify the sinner, nor perfect the conscience of the most exact worshipper. It could only stop their mouths and manifest their guilt before God. How vain is it for sinners now to think they can obtain life by their obedience to the moral law, though they add thereto their diligent observance of Gospel ordinances ? Much more is it vain for people to imagine that they can recommend themselves to the divine favour by will-worship and services of their own devising. Sometimes people form themselves, in their own imagination, such a covenant of works as may suit their inclination, or such as they suppose adapted to their capacity, and they state the terms of it as low as they think they can reach to. But this is all delusion. The terms of life, according to the law of works, are invariably the same, in every form in which it ever was exhibited. “ The man that doeth these things shall live in them.” If any sinner will deal with the law for life, besides satisfaction for bygone offences, he must yield universal, perfect, and persevering obedience ; all which is to him utterly impossible.

Further, from the preceding account we may learn the peculiarity of that method of justification and life which is exhibited in the Gospel. It is contrasted with that which is stated in the Sinai covenant, as

standing in direct opposition to it. The righteousness which is of the law is described in this wise, "The man that doth these things shall live in them;" but "the righteousness which is of faith" is entirely different from this; and the difference between the two does not lie in such things as many suppose. The difference does not lie in having internal, spiritual, and moral obedience substituted in the place of external obedience and ceremonial service, as the ground of acceptance with God; for that also belonged to the righteousness of the law. It does not lie in having what some call Gospel-righteousness,—faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, put in the place of what they reckon legal works; for justification on this ground, though it were possible, would still be by the works of the law. It does not lie in having any act of obedience, such as faith, substituted in the place of universal and perfect conformity to the law. Acceptance with God upon the ground of any act of obedience we perform, necessarily comes under the description of that righteousness which is of the law. Justification by faith stands in opposition to every supposable method of justification by works, of whatever kind they be, and whether many or few. According to the Gospel, a sinner is justified before God, not by any thing he does, but by what he believes; and his faith hath no other concern in the matter, than as it receives and applies the righteousness which the Gospel reveals.



## ESSAY VII.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH, DURING THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTORY to the consideration of the Old Testament church, strictly so called, some general account has been given in a former Essay<sup>2</sup> of the state of the church in the first ages of the world. For various important ends, God saw meet to introduce a new state of the church considerably different from that in which it had subsisted from the beginning. It had been diffused among mankind at large, and greatly hurt by intercourse with the world ; but it was now to be more collected and united in one organized visible society in one place, among one people, and under a peculiar system of ordinances. This new state is called THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH, and sometimes the JEWISH CHURCH. The foundation of this church was laid in the covenant made with Abraham, and it was fully organized and formally constituted by the covenant at Sinai. The nature, the connection, and difference of these two covenants, have been already considered in

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. 292.      <sup>2</sup> Essay III.



the last three Essays. It is now proposed to shew that the children of Israel were formed into a true visible church ; that they, along with some few proselytes from the neighbouring nations, constituted the only church of God in the world, from the giving of the law to the coming of Christ ; and that this church, notwithstanding some things peculiar to its state in that period, is the same which is now continued under the New Testament.

It is the more necessary to attend to this point, because, as has been formerly observed, the very existence of a real visible church among the Israelites, is by some expressly denied ; and if the name of a church is admitted, it is allowed only in a typical sense. We are told that what is called the church of old Israel, was only a worldly kingdom, typical of the church of true believers under the New Testament. There are others, who, though they do not go this length, yet extend their typical system so far as to leave the people of Israel little more than a mere shadow of a church. There was, indeed, a typical character attached to the Israelites, and there were many things belonging both to their civil and ecclesiastical state, which served as shadows of good things to come ; but any typical character which they sustained, did not abolish their real character, their natural character as men, their civil character as citizens, or their ecclesiastical character as church members. There were various things peculiar to that state of the church which were introduced principally for the purpose of exhibiting, as by a shadow, good things to come : but we must not on that

account, represent as types and shadows those things which are essential to a church-state, nor say that their privilege as God's people, their profession and character, and their worship in general, were types and shadows of the privilege, profession, character, and worship of the New Testament church.

The apostle, indeed, calls not only the privileges and worship of the Israelites, but even their sins and punishments, by the name of *types*; 1 Cor. x. 11. "All these things happened unto them for ensamples." The word is *tupoi*, *types*. And the things so called are the privileges of the Israelites, their abuse of these privileges, and the judgments inflicted upon them on account of their sin. Our translators, accordingly, in stating the contents of that chapter, call the Jewish "sacraments types of ours." But it is evident, that the apostle did not use the word *type* in that sense in which it is now commonly applied. By a *type* is now commonly understood, that which, though in its own nature carnal or external, serves as a shadow to represent something that is spiritual and heavenly. Thus, we call the earthly sanctuary a type of the heavenly, the sacrifices of slain beasts types of the sacrifice of Christ, &c.; and in this view the type and the anti-type are things of a very different nature; but the things compared by the apostle, 1 Cor. x, are of the same nature. The sacraments of the Israelites were of the same nature with ours; otherwise the apostle's argument would not be conclusive. He is proving that our privileges, if we abuse them, will not protect us from punishment, by this argument, that the privileges of

ancient Israel did not protect them. This plainly supposes, that the privileges of both are materially the same. The sins of ancient Israel were of the same nature with those which he warns the Corinthians to avoid ; and the judgment inflicted on many of the Corinthians for an abuse of the Lord's supper, was of the same kind with those inflicted upon the Israelites, 1 Cor. xi. 30. It is evident, therefore, that the apostle calls that a type which is an instructive example or pattern of another thing of the same kind ; and in this sense the word is commonly used in the New Testament. In Rom. iv. 14, Adam is called a figure (a type) of Christ ; and this refers to the public character he sustained in the one covenant, and to that which Christ sustains in the other ; but as the word *type* is used in the present time, Adam can no more be called a type of Christ, than the covenant of works can be called a type of the covenant of grace. In Phil. iii. 17, Paul calls himself an *example* to the church.

Timothy is exhorted to be an *example* to believers, 1 Tim. iv. 12. The elders are exhorted to be *ensamples* to the flock, 1 Pet. v. 3. The Thessalonians were *ensamples* to all that believed in Macedonia ; 1 Thess. i. 7. The original word used in all these texts is *tupos*, a type ; but surely it would be very improper to call ministers types of the people, or Christians types of one another, in the same sense in which we used to call the shadows of the law types of things spiritual and heavenly. Therefore, when the apostle calls the privileges and ordinances enjoined by ancient

Israel, by the name of types, he does it in such a sense as excludes the idea of their being shadows of the privileges and ordinances of the Christian church.

That the church of Israel was a real visible church, and not a mere figure or shadow of the New Testament church, might be illustrated and confirmed by a variety of considerations. The *privileges* of the Israelites, their *character* and *worship*, prove them to have been real church-members.

1. The children of Israel were possessed of such *privileges* as belong only to church-members. They, indeed, enjoyed a variety of earthly and temporal privileges, which served as a shadow of the spiritual and eternal privileges of true believers in every age. They had an external redemption, an earthly inheritance in Canaan, and many temporal privileges as members of the commonwealth of Israel, which were appointed to be shadows of good things to come. But they had other privileges, which were in their nature the very same with those of the Christian church, and of which, therefore, they could not be reckoned a shadow. It is not necessary here to consider at large the privileges of church-members; it is sufficient if it be made to appear that the Israelites were partakers even of any of them. One leading privilege of the members of the visible church, is the peculiar relation they stand in to God as his people in covenant with him. That the Israelites stood in such a relation to God, is beyond all reasonable contradiction. To quote all the texts wherein God calls himself their God, and owns them to be his people—the texts where they are spoken of as God's property, his

portion and inheritance, would be to repeat a great part of the Bible. Some, indeed, consider the privilege ascribed to Israel as God's peculiar people as arising from some kind of a theocracy supposed to have been established among them in relation to their civil state; according to which, God held the place of civil magistrate, and the people stood in the relation to God in which those of other nations stood to their kings or governors. There is not room here to expose the absurdity of that imaginary theocracy; but even although the truth of it were admitted, it would not account for the peculiar relation between God and Israel. Those who suppose such a theocracy, consider it as founded in the Sinaitic covenant, and as having no existence till the erection of the national state of Israel. But their relation to God so often asserted in Scripture, did not then commence, nor did it arise from the covenant at Sinai. They are as expressly called God's people before as after; and that covenant is prefaced with a declaration of such a relation already in existence. The relation in question was founded on, and according to the tenor of, the Abrahamic covenant. The covenant at Sinai did not abolish that relation by the substitution of another of a different kind; as indeed this latter covenant was only an appendix to the former, and subservient to its accomplishment. The privilege of Israel as God's peculiar people, is mentioned as connected with the Sinaitic covenant, *Exod. xix. v. 6*; but the declaration there made is principally to be understood of the manifestation of a privilege already established by the covenant made with Abraham.



Now, the covenant made with Abraham was, as to its substance and principal matter, just the covenant of grace, now administered to the New Testament church, Gal. iii. 8, 14. And the relation of the Israelites to God, according to that covenant, must be the very same with that of church-members now. It is not pretended that all the people of Israel were savingly interested in the covenant of grace; for this cannot be said of all the members of the Christian church; but true believers among them had a saving interest in God's covenant, as really as believers now; and all the Israelites, as enjoying an external administration of the covenant of grace, and admitted, by God's own warrant, to the seals of it, must necessarily be considered as standing in that same relation to God which is the privilege of the members of the visible church under the New Testament. Their sacraments, both permanent and temporary, although in their outward form adapted to the peculiar dispensation of grace which then obtained, exhibited and sealed the same blessings as the sacraments of the New Testament; 1 Cor. v. 7, 8; x. 34.

Another privilege which proves the title of the Israelites to the character of church-members, is the *adoption* ascribed to them. Their relation to God was not only that of his covenant-people, but it was the relation of children to a father; and God himself acknowledged them in that character, Ezek. iv. 22. "Israel is my son, even my first-born." And the apostle tells us (Rom. ix. 4) that to Israel "pertained the adoption." Now, this adoption was not a figure and shadow of the adoption of true believers under the New Testa-



ment. It is substantially the same adoption which is ascribed to church-members now. It is not the province of man to judge of the spiritual state of individuals as it is before God ; but on the same ground that the members of the visible church now are addressed as God's children, an adoption substantially the same is ascribed to the members of the church of Israel. It is true, the apostle speaks of adoption as the peculiar privilege of the church under the New Testament, as a fruit of her redemption from the Sinaitic covenant, Gal. iv. 4-5. But that passage, as it respects the state of the church, is to be understood of the manifestation of the privilege rather than of the privilege itself.

In the beginning of the chapter, the apostle compares the church under the law of Moses to a child in minority, which is under tutors and governors, and is treated like a servant ; but still it is a child, and the advancement to maturity does not add any thing to the relation and real dignity, whatever it may do as to the manifestation thereof.

2. That the congregation of Israel was really the church of God, and that the Israelites were really church-members, appears from their *character*. The same character that belongs to the members of the Christian church under the New Testament belonged unto them. Are the members of the church under the New Testament addressed as believers and saints ? The members of the Jewish church are addressed in the same way, or in terms of the same import. They are frequently spoken of as *believers*, and particular instances of their faith are proposed for our imitation. At the Red Sea they believed God's

word, and sang his praise, Psal. cvi. 12 ; while, on the other hand, instances of their unbelief are recorded for our warning, Heb. iii. iv. It may possibly be said that the instances of their faith mentioned, respected the promise of temporal blessings. It was doubtless their duty to believe such promises ; but there is no reason to restrict their faith in that way, as they were called to believe all the revelation with which God favoured them ; and some might have a saving faith of the promise of spiritual blessings, whose faith about other promises was very deficient. The case of that generation that died in the wilderness, was a proof of this. At any rate, unless we deny that the revelation they enjoyed was a revelation of grace, we must admit, that the faith ascribed to them was of the same nature with that ascribed to the members of the Christian church. It is not our business to determine what individuals among them, or what proportion of them, were partakers of saving faith, any more than it is our business to enter into such a judgment about the members of the Christian church. Our judgment about the members of the visible church proceeds upon the profession they make : and the profession of faith made by Israel was at times as particular and solemn as that of any now can be. They avouched the Lord to be their God, Deut. xxvi. 17. They professed their faith of God's covenant, and of his covenant character, correspondent to the revelation they enjoyed, just as we are to profess our faith according to the Gospel revelation. Their profession was materially the same with that of church-members now,—a profession of their own faith in God's

covenant-character, avouching the Lord to be their God, and not to be considered as a figure of the faith of the New Testament church, unless we suppose that God's covenant-character was only a figure too.

The children of Israel, the members of the Jewish church, are also called *saints*, and often described as a holy people. The church of Israel is called a congregation or church of saints, Psal. lxxxix. 5. The word *congregation* in the Old Testament is equivalent to the word *church* in the New; compare Psal. xxii. 22. with Heb. ii. 12. They are called a holy people, Deut. vii. 6; xiv. 2-21; Dan. viii. 24. Some, however, will tell us, that this is only to be understood of some kind of ceremonial or typical holiness, some external separation to God, prefiguring the real holiness of the Christian church; and the character and conduct of that people, their ignorance and carnality, their rebellion, their idolatry, and many other evils, are held out as precluding all supposition of their being called a holy people in any other sense. But this character is ascribed to the children of Israel in the same sense and meaning, and upon the same grounds on which it is ascribed to the members of the New Testament church; and the evils with which they were justly charged were not inconsistent with this, while similar evils taking place among the members of the Christian church, have not prevented their being addressed as saints. Without extenuating the faults of the former, or aggravating those of the latter, if we take into account the superior means and advantages now enjoyed and the aggravations of sin thence arising, the difference will

not be considerable. The comparison is, in a manner, stated already by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. He addresses them as saints, chap. i. 2. Yet he charges them in general with contention and carnality, chap. iii. 3; and some of them with a shameful ignorance of God, chap. xv. 34. But especially in chap. x, he states a comparison, little to their advantage, between them and the generation that died in the wilderness, in respect to murmuring, lusting after evil things, fornication, and idolatry; yet they were not divested of the character and privilege of church-members.

For explaining the nature of that holiness ascribed to the children of Israel, and the ground upon which they were called saints, it may be necessary to observe, that there is what may be called a relative holiness, and there is what may be called, in distinction from the former, a real holiness, though both are real in their kind; and, on account of either, or both of these, the members, whether of the Jewish or of the Christian church, are called holy. There is a relative holiness which consists in being dedicated to God, or separated and set apart to God, for holy service. In this sense, the priests under the law were particularly holy, as having a peculiar service, and all the people of Israel were separated from the heathen, and set apart to the service of God as a holy priesthood. In this sense, also, all the members of the Christian church are holy. And this kind of holiness in the members of the Jewish church was no more a type and figure of the holiness of true believers, than it is in the members of the Chris-

tian church. Again, there is a real holiness in the members of the church in respect of the purity of their character and conduct ; and this may apply either to that purity of heart and character which is the attainment of true believers, and is known only to God, or to that external purity of conduct which is visible to the world. Now, the children of Israel are called saints, in respect of this real holiness, as well as the members of the Christian church. No man will pretend that all the members of the visible church under the New Testament are spiritually holy in the sight of God ; and no man will deny, that there were many gracious saints in the church of Israel ; and, if all the members of the visible church now are called saints, in the way of taking the denomination from the better part, why may not all the members of the church of Israel be called saints on the same ground ? But besides this, there is an external purity of character in all that ought to be acknowledged as church-members, on account of which they may be called saints, and of which only men can judge ; and certainly it cannot be pretended, that the Israelites were altogether destitute of this, or in such a degree as to deprive them of all title to the character of church-members. In some periods there was a great degeneracy as there has also been in the Christian church ; yet, in general, the difference between them and the heathen, in respect of external conduct, was as discernible as that between the church and the world in later times. Frequently, indeed, they mingled with the heathen, and learned their way ; there were many blemishes in their conduct,



and many gross and scandalous offences were found among them ; but these did not abolish their character as members of the church, more than such things now. A mode of professing repentance, for removing the scandal, and restoring them to the enjoyment of their privileges, was prescribed. In bringing their sin-offering to the priest, they made an acknowledgment of their offence, and professed their faith of mercy through an atonement. This was somewhat correspondent to the discipline of the Christian church, whereby the scandals that fall out are removed. In many instances it is acknowledged there was a great neglect of the rule of discipline which God had prescribed ; but, is not this the case still ? As to presumptuous sinners who would not submit to this discipline, they were to be cut off from their people ; and, whether by this we are to understand extirpation, or excommunication, it was a very effectual mean for preserving the purity of the church.

3. That the congregation or church of Israel was truly and properly the church of God, is evident from the *worship* that obtained among them. It is the peculiar privilege of the church to enjoy the positive institutions of worship which belong to the administration of God's covenant ; and they must necessarily be acknowledged as church members who profess their faith in God's covenant, by worshipping him in the observance of these ordinances. There is a moral worship, founded on the law of nature, which is incumbent upon all ; but sinners can worship God acceptably only in a correspondence with the revelation of grace, and no ordinances of worship were ever given to men since



the fall, but what had a relation to the covenant of grace. Such were the institutions of worship given to the Israelites, and observed by them ; and they had the same title to be accounted church members as those have who now receive and observe the ordinances of worship peculiar to the New Testament.

But here we are put in mind, that the ordinances of the Jewish church are carnal ; we are told that the worship of it was figurative, and typical of that of the New Testament church. Nay, some even go the length of alleging, that all the peculiar worship of the Tabernacle was only a kind of civil homage to God, as the supreme civil magistrate over the nation of Israel. As to this last allegation, it hardly deserves a serious reply. Every service and homage, of which God is the immediate object, must refer to his supreme character as God, not to any supposed inferior character, and must be considered as part of religious and divine worship. Their worship, as to a great part of it, might be called typical, as many of the things made use of, and the services about them, were shadows of good things to come ; and, as the covenant of grace was then, in a great measure, exhibited and administered by types and shadows, it behoved that their worship should correspond with that exhibition ; but their worship is not, on that account, to be considered as a type or shadow of the external worship of the New Testament church. The great antitype of the Tabernacle service was the service of Christ, and not the service of the New Testament church. The external worship of the Jewish church was as real as that of the Christian

church, and not a mere shadow of it ; just as the spiritual worship of true believers then was of the same nature and reality with that of believers now. The abhorrence that God sometimes expressed of their external and ritual worship, as in Psalm l. 13, 14, and Isaiah, i. 11—15, by no means contradicts the reality and acceptableness of that worship when duly performed. It only intimates a censure of their hypocrisy in resting in, or trusting to, that external or ritual service, while neglecting moral duties and spiritual worship ; and the same censure is applicable still to those who, under the Christian dispensation, rest in the externals of religion ; for prayer is there mentioned in the censure as well as sacrifice.

Many, and even the most, of the ordinances of the Old Testament were carnal in one sense or other. They might be called carnal in respect of their symbolical nature. Carnal and worldly things, and external services about them, were used as signs and symbols of things spiritual and heavenly. On this account, the apostle calls them the “elements of the world.”<sup>1</sup> But, in respect of such symbolical ordinances, the difference between the Old and the New Testament is only comparative, or in degree ; for baptism and the Lord’s supper are as really symbolical ordinances, as circumcision and the passover. The ordinances which the apostle calls carnal, Heb. ix. 10, were those which referred to the purification of the flesh or the body from ceremonial pollution, and “which

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 3.

stood in meats, and drinks, and divers washings," or baptisms. These ordinances were also symbolical, very useful to the Old Testament church, and, in the observance of them, the people had an opportunity of worshipping God acceptably, and professing their faith in the spiritual things which they prefigured. From such carnal ordinances the Christian church is fully relieved; but the contrast which the apostle states, when speaking of these carnal ordinances, is not between them and the ordinances or worship of the Christian church, but a contrast between them and the sacrifice of Christ. The former purified the flesh, the other purges the conscience. The ordinances of the Gospel-church can no more purge the conscience than these carnal ordinances could do.

The reality of the church-state of the Israelites might be further illustrated by an enlargement of these, and by a variety of other arguments; but this would lead beyond the proper limits of an Essay.

## ESSAY VIII.

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH UNDER THE OLD  
AND NEW TESTAMENT.<sup>1</sup>

IN the preceding Essay, the nature of the Old Testament church has been considered; and it has been shewn, that the congregation or church of Israel was a real visible church, of the same nature with that under the New Testament, and not a mere figure and shadow of it. It is now proposed to shew, that it was the very same identical church which still subsists under the New Testament. This point follows as a native inference from the former. If the congregation of Israel was really the church of God, it must have been that same church which is still continued under the Gospel; for God never had a church but one. There has been, in many particulars, a considerable diversity in the state and condition of this church, in different periods of its existence, and there is also a continued accession of new members, while others are removed

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. p. 318.

from its visible state in this world; yet it is still the same church, and the same society, under all these changes.

1. The identity of the Old and of the New Testament church might be illustrated and confirmed by the identity of the *covenant*, under the administration of which the church is gathered and maintained. This is like the charter of that society; and a society, notwithstanding many changes, is considered the same while under the same charter. It was formerly observed that the church of Israel was under an administration of the covenant of grace, that same covenant that is administered to the church still. The apostle, indeed, speaks of a new covenant made with the church now, different from a former covenant made with the house of Israel, Heb. viii. But the former covenant referred to, is that temporary covenant which the church was brought under at Sinai. The covenant whereby Israel was brought into a church-state, and maintained in it, was that made with Abraham. It was this covenant that the church pleaded, and which God remembered in behalf of his church, when there was no plea to God's favour by the Sinaitic covenant. This last was an appendix to the former, and it could not abolish it, nor supply the place of it. This covenant made with Abraham, the charter of the church of Israel, was a covenant of free promise, that same covenant of grace which is exhibited to us in the Gospel, Gal. iii; Heb. vi. The members of the Jewish church are called the children of this covenant, Acts, iii. 25; and the members of the Christian church are also call-

ed the children of it, Gal. iv. 28. "Now we, brethren as Isaac was, are children of the promise." And in agreeableness to this, Abraham is called the father of all church-members, whether Jews or Gentiles. The church of Israel, therefore, and the church now, is just one and the same society, and the same family.

2. That the church under the Old and under the New Testament is one and the same church, is evident from the identity of *Christ's relation* to it in all periods. It was the same under the Old Testament that it is under the New. To illustrate this, with respect to all the various relations in which Christ stands to his church, would far exceed our present limits. It may be sufficient, for the present purpose, to illustrate this by one relation. Christ is the King and Head, the Lord and Lawgiver of his church, and he was as really such to the church of Israel, as he is to the church now ; and that society may well be counted the same, which is still under the same head, notwithstanding some difference of circumstances otherwise. That the Lord the Redeemer stood in this relation to the church of Israel, is evident from the many declarations he makes of it, Isa. xliii. 15 : "I am the Lord your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." Chap. xlv. 6, "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, I am the First and I am the Last." Compare this with Rev. i. 8. Zeph. iii. 14—15, "Sing, O daughter of Zion ! Shout, O Israel ! Be glad and rejoice, O daughter of Jerusalem ! The King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee." We find, also, this relation frequently professed and gloried



in by the church, Psal. lxxxix. 18 : "The Holy One of Israel is our King;" Isa. xxxiii. 22, "The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; he will save us." This was a leading article of the faith and profession of the church of Israel; and when Christ came in the flesh, he was acknowledged, even in his humiliation, as the King of Israel by all who believed him to be the promised Messiah.<sup>1</sup> Now, the Lord Christ, the King and Head of the church, acted fully up to this character in the church of Israel. He who is now speaking to us from heaven, gave the law from Mount Sinai, Heb. xii. 25-26. He appointed all the ordinances of the church, and furnished its office-bearers. It was the Spirit of Christ who spake in the prophets, 1 Pet. i. 2. As the angel of God's presence, he was in the midst of the church, and, by certain symbols of his presence, he sat enthroned upon the mercy-seat between the cherubim.

This character which Christ sustained as the King of Israel, must not be explained away from its relation to the church, by applying it to the national or civil state of Israel. There was, no doubt, something very peculiar in the constitution and laws of the civil state of Israel, as there were some peculiar ends of its erection. The church of Israel had an earthly inheritance, and the observance of many of its ordinances was confined to a particular spot in the land of promise. It was, therefore, necessary that they should have a civil government among themselves, with laws correspond-

<sup>1</sup> John, i. 49; xii. 13.

ing to the special ends of the erection of that national state and government. Also, in a conformity to this, there was a very special providence exercised about the kingdom of Israel, and God from time to time raised up supreme civil governors to that people, as he saw it necessary for them. On all these accounts, they might well be charged with rejecting God from reigning over them, 1 Sam. viii. 7, in that they despised or distrusted the provision God made for their government. But we are not to consider the character of the King of Israel, which the Lord the Redeemer sustained, as relating to any peculiarity of their civil state. It had a relation principally, if not only, to their church-state. Accordingly, the symbolical throne whereby his royal presence among that people was intimated, had no relation to that of an earthly kingdom. It was a throne of grace for the dispensation of the blessings of salvation to the church, and all access to it was only by the blood of atonement. In like manner, when Christ came in the flesh as the King of Israel, he claimed and exercised no power about the civil state.

3. Further, the unity and identity of the church, under both dispensations, might be illustrated by a variety of passages of Scripture wherein the church under the Old Testament is comforted with *promises* of the glory to which she would be brought under the New. Only a few of these passages shall be pointed out : Isa. ii. 2-3 ; xlix. 14-23 ; lx. and lxii. chapters throughout ; Zech. ii. 10-11 ; viii. 9-10. These and other passages the reader may consult. The object addressed

and comforted in these promises is the church ; and it is addressed under the names of Zion and Jerusalem, because there was the seat of her solemn worship. The glory of the literal Zion and Jerusalem is now perished ; but the promises are fulfilled respecting that church which once worshipped there. That very church, which, for a long time, was mostly confined to one people, worshipping at Jerusalem, was, in due time, to be greatly extended by a large accession of the Gentiles.

It is no sufficient objection to this proof, to tell us that it is common to apply these things to the type, which only belong to the antitype ; for it has been already shewn, that the congregation of Israel was really the church of God, and not a figure or shadow of it. But besides this, under the New Testament, these things are ascribed to the church, which had place only under the former dispensation ; which is a clear proof that it is the same church which then subsisted, Gal. iii. 23–25. “ Before faith came, *we* were kept under the law ; wherefore the law was *our* schoolmaster. But after that faith is come, *we* are no longer under a schoolmaster.” Chap. iv. 3, “ Even so *we*, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” In these texts, it is intimated that the same church which was formerly under the bondage of the law, now enjoyed the liberty of the Gospel. Some may allege that the Apostle speaks here only of the believing Jews, who formerly were under the law of Moses, and were now set free from it. But this allegation is without ground ; for the

apostle speaks of the church in general, and of the Galatians, who were Gentile converts. Chap. iv. 9, "How turn ye *again* to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire *again* to be in bondage." Chap. v. 1, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not *again* entangled with the yoke of bondage." The Galatians, by the influence of the false teachers, were in danger of being drawn to the observance of the law of Moses. This the apostle calls their being entangled *again* with the yoke of bondage. But such an expression will not apply to their case on any other ground, but that now they were members of the church which formerly was under that yoke. And that it was the same church which was formerly under the law, and was now in a state of liberty, is fully evident from the comparison stated, chap. iv. 1, 2. A child in minority is under tutors and governors, and is treated like a servant; when grown up, it enjoys more liberty, but it is still the same child. Even so it is with the church, notwithstanding the difference of its condition under the Old and under the New Testament, verse 3, 4.

4. The church is, in Scripture, called by various *names*, some of which are metaphorical and mystical; and, under these various names, it is still represented as one and the same under both dispensations. It is called a "kingdom,"—"the kingdom of God," and "the kingdom of heaven." This name is, indeed, often used with a particular application to the state of the church under the New Testament. John the Baptist, and also Jesus, entered on their ministry, declaring that

“the kingdom of God” was “at hand,” Mark, i. 15. That designation is given to the New Testament church, eminently, but not exclusively, intimating a more glorious and perfect state of this kingdom ; but it admits a former existence of it. God set up his kingdom among the children of Israel, and it was in respect of their church-state that they are called a kingdom of priests unto God. Now, it is this very kingdom, in its improved state, that now subsists under the Gospel, Matt. viii. 11, 12. “Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness.” Here the Jews are called “the children of the kingdom,” who were to be cast out because of their unbelief, and the Gentiles were to be admitted into that kingdom out of which the Jews were to be cast. The same thing is intimated very plainly in Matt. xxi. 43. “Therefore, I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” It was the same kingdom which was taken from the Jews, that was given to the Gentiles.

In that context, the truth is set forth under another metaphor. The church, with its privileges, is compared to a vineyard, taken from one people and given to another. The people of Israel, in respect of their church-state, are called the Lord’s vineyard ; Isaiah, ix. 7, “For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant



plant." Now, in the parable, Matt. xx. 33-41, the Jews are represented as the husbandmen, to whom the vineyard was let out ; but they persecuted the servants, and killed the heir, who came seeking the fruit from them ; therefore, the vineyard was taken from them, and given to others. The vineyard, that is, the church-state with its privileges, which was taken from the Jews, was given to the Gentiles.

A similar illustration of this point we have in the Epistle to the Romans, chap. xi. 17-24. There the church of God is represented under the metaphor of a good olive tree, and the Jews as the national branches, because they had been long members of the church ; but the greater part of them were broken off because of unbelief. On the other hand, the Gentiles are represented as the branches of a wild olive, and their admission into the church and to its privileges is set forth under the emblem of their being grafted into the good olive, among the remaining natural branches. They were ingrafted into that very olive, from which the unbelieving Jews were broken off. This is a plain proof, that the church of the Jews was the very same with that of the Gentiles.

In fine, the church of Christ, under both dispensations, is represented as *one person mystical*. The church is called the bride and spouse of Christ, and is set forth as a joyful mother of children. The church of Israel is often spoken of under this character, as married to the Lord, and the mother of his children, Isaiah, liv. ; lxii. ; Ezekiel, xvi. ; Hosea, ii. It is un-



necessary to quote all the texts particularly. Now, this spouse of Christ is comforted with various promises of a great increase of children from among the Gentiles in New Testament times. One remarkable instance of this we have in Isaiah, xlix. 20-22. "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me : give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro ? and who hath brought up these ? Behold, I was left alone ; these, where had they been ? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people : And they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders." But how could Gentile converts under the New Testament be promised as children to this mother, unless the church were one and the same under both dispensations ?

In the New Testament, also, the church is often described as the spouse of Christ, and the mother of children, that is, of church members. And this is meant, not of the New Testament church only, in contradistinction from the church of Israel, but of that which subsisted under both dispensations. This is particularly evident from the representations given of the church, Rev. xii. The church is there represented under the emblem of a woman, passing through various scenes. First, she appeared as with child, and in tra-

vail, then as bringing forth a man child, whom the great dragon sought to devour as soon as born. This is meant of Jesus Christ, for he is described as the ruler of all nations, and is distinguished from the *remnant* of the woman's seed, as the first-born among many brethren. He suffered, indeed, from the fury of the dragon ; but he was not devoured nor destroyed. He was taken up to God and his throne. Now, Jesus Christ, the Lord and Redeemer of the church, came into the world as a Son of the church, and is not ashamed to call the members of the church his brethren. The great promise to the church of old was the birth of this Son, the prime heir of all the promises ; and such was the anxious desire of the church for the coming of Christ, that she might well be represented as a woman in labour, and "pained to be delivered." And this very church, of whom Christ was born, is that which was afterwards persecuted by the Roman and anti-christian powers ; which it could not have been, unless it had been the same with the church of Israel, for it was of that church that Jesus was born, an object of the promises, and subject to the ordinances of it. It may also be added, that if the Christian church were not the same with the church of Israel, our privilege, in respect of intimate connection with Jesus as a Son of the church, would not be equal to that of the Jews ; for the New Testament state of the church was not established till after Christ's ascension into heaven.

This doctrine of the identity of the church of Christ under the Old and under the New Testament, is in-

timately connected with many important doctrines respecting the state and privilege of it in both periods ; and particularly, it is useful to ascertain who are to be accounted church-members ; and it might have been illustrated and confirmed by various other arguments, which, for the sake of brevity, are omitted.

## ESSAY IX.

INFANTS MEMBERS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

AMONG the various controversies which have been agitated concerning the visible church, that which respects the church-state and privilege of infants, is not the least important. Independents, who, for the most part, acknowledge no other visible church than a voluntary association of a certain number of Christians in one congregation, cannot, consistently with that principle, allow that infants are church-members, as they are incapable of adjoining themselves to the church in that way. Accordingly, many of them, though they admit infants to baptism, hesitate about what account is to be made of them; whether they are to be considered as church-members, or only as put under the care of the church, in order to their preparation for that state. Others of them positively deny that infants are church-

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. p. 353.

members, and, more consistently in this point, refuse to admit them to baptism.

It is a considerable presumption in favour of the church-state of the infants of church-members—for about such only is this question—that, in civil society, the privilege of children is the same with that of their parents. The kingdoms of this world consist of infants as well as adults ; and shall we think that infants are excluded from a place in the kingdom of Christ ? The children of British subjects are entitled to the same privileges as their parents, although, in the mean time, they be not capable of an understanding or full enjoyment of them. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to suppose, that the constitution of Christ's kingdom is every whit as favourable to the privilege of infants ? We are not, however, left to supposition and analogy in this matter ; their privilege may be clearly established from the Word of God. God's covenant with his church extends to parents and their children. Infants were members of the church under the Old Testament, and there is no word of their exclusion under the New ; nay, in the New Testament there are various testimonies, that the privilege of church-membership extends to infants still.

1. That the infants of such as are members of the visible church, are also church-members, is evident from the interest which they have in God's covenant, and from the covenant-relation in which they stand to God. The promise of the covenant is to the parents and to their children ; Deut. xxx. 6, “ The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy

seed, to love the Lord thy God." Accordingly, when the people of Israel solemnly entered into God's covenant, their little ones were admitted along with them; Deut. xxix. 10-14, "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your *little ones*, your wives, &c. that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath,—that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he has said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Now, this covenant which comprehended the Israelites and their *little ones*, was not peculiar to that period, nor to the state into which they were brought by the transactions at Sinai: It was the same covenant that God had made with their fathers before the giving of the law, and which he had confirmed to them by his oath. It was the covenant made with Abraham, renewed with Isaac and Jacob, and now again established with the congregation of Israel, parents and children. And that covenant was not now extended any farther than in the establishment of it with Abraham, Gen. xvii. 7—"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." It has been already shewn, that the covenant made with Abraham, particularly as set forth in this great promise, is just the covenant of grace administered to the church still; and it is by no means contracted, so as to exclude infants from the interest



they had in it under its ancient administration. Any supposition of its being thus contracted, would be very injurious to the goodness of God.

But besides this, we have positive evidence that, under the New Testament, the covenant of grace is still exhibited and administered, in the same extent, to parents and to their children. In the promises of the happy restoration of the Jews, in New Testament times, to their former covenant-state and privileges, the restoration of their offspring along with them is plainly intimated, particularly in Isa. lxx. 23—"They are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, *and their offspring* with them." And at the erection of the New Testament church, the apostle Peter assures the Jews, that there was no alteration of God's covenant in this respect, Acts, ii. 39—"For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call." This text has been frequently quoted, to prove the covenant state and privilege of infants, and various exceptions have been offered for evading the force of it. Some tell us, that the promise here meant is that of the prophet Joel, quoted in a preceding part of the chapter, concerning the miraculous gifts which God would bestow upon his church at this period. But, even though this were admitted to be the promise intended, the argument drawn from this text would still hold good ; for if children are made partakers of the gifts which God has promised to bestow upon his church, it is no bad proof that they are church-members. There is, however, good reason for not admitting that the promise

concerning miraculous powers is that which is here intended; for, though these miraculous powers were conferred on many, they were not conferred on all church-members; nor had they any such connection with baptism; as to be the ground upon which it was administered, or the blessing to be thereby confirmed. It is the covenant of grace that is here spoken of, as exhibited to Abraham in the form of a promise. This is often called in Scripture, "the promise," by way of distinction and eminency. And, when the apostle states their relation to this covenant as a reason enforcing the call to repent, and to be baptized, for the remission of sin, his reasoning is exactly parallel to that which is used in chap. iii. 19, 25, "Repent—ye are the children of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." That which is called the "promise" in the former text, is called the "covenant" in this.

Another exception offered against this proof is, that it is not infant children that are here meant, but those that were grown up, and capable as well as their parents of faith and repentance. But, if this had been the case, it signified nothing whether they were their children or not; and the apostle told them nothing about their children, but what was equally true of all their friends and neighbours, to whom the Gospel was yet preached. It is further urged, that the apostle mentions their children just in the same way that, in the next clause, he mentions those "that are afar off," who cannot be said to have had any benefit by their faith

and profession. But there is a good reason for mentioning those "afar off," that would not apply to their adult children. No one could entertain a doubt about the privilege of their adult children, who were in the same state with themselves, but they apprehended that the case was very different with those "that were afar off." Some suppose that, by this designation, the apostle means the Jews of the dispersion, or those who, in the New Testament, are usually called Greeks or Hellenists. The Jews in Judea considered themselves as entitled to a preference to them, and to superior privileges; but the Jews of the dispersion, as well as those of Judea, were treated as God's covenant-people, till they rejected the Gospel. Others suppose, that the Gentiles are here intended, as they are described in the same way in some other texts. And though the apostle did not yet fully understand the way in which they were to be admitted into the church, he knew that it was to be so, and the Spirit of God directed him thus to intimate the calling of the Gentiles, their admission into the church, and to a participation of the same privileges with the Jews. The apostle, therefore, here declares the privilege of the Jews, and intimates that the Gentiles, when called, would come into the same privilege. "The promise is to you and to your children," as God's covenant-people; and, in like manner, when the Lord shall call in the Gentiles who are now "afar off," they and their children will have a like interest in the covenant and promise. But it is proper to observe, that the interest in God's covenant here ascribed to the infants of the

covenant-people, is that which is common to all the members of the visible church ; and it is that only we have to do with in acknowledging them, and treating them as church-members. As to a spiritual and saving interest in the covenant, we have no business to judge of it in the admission either of adults or infants.

2. That infant children were members of the church of Israel, is abundantly evident. Their *little ones*, as already observed, were entered into covenant with God ; and this is admitted by those who will not acknowledge infants as members of the church now. But, if the church then comprehended infants as well as adults, it must do so still. The identity of the church under the Old and under the New Testament has, in the preceding Essay, been established by various arguments, which it is unnecessary here to repeat. The kingdom of God, given to the Gentiles, was that which was taken from the Jews.<sup>1</sup> The olive tree into which believing Gentiles were ingrafted, was that from which the unbelieving Jews were broken off.<sup>2</sup> But the church under the New Testament must be, indeed, a very different kingdom from what obtained before, if infants are excluded from it. And who dare exclude them ? There is not a hint in all the New Testament of any such exclusion, nor of any change of the state of the church as to that point. The only pretence that has any appearance of it, is taken from these texts where faith, or a profession of faith, is required as necessary to admission, such

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxi. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xi. 17.

as Mark, xvi. 16. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." But if this be admitted as a proof of the exclusion of infants from the privilege of church-members, it is equally a proof of their exclusion from salvation. Such a method of arguing would have equally excluded infants from being members of the church of Israel, because faith and obedience were declared to be as essential to the character of church-members then as now.<sup>1</sup> To suppose such an exclusion, would make the Gentiles to be in a worse state now than under the Old Testament. Strangers had then access to join the church of Israel in the appointed way, and their little ones were admitted along with them, Exod. xii. 48,—“And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all *his males be circumcised*, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land, for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.” Strangers may now, indeed, be admitted to the church without circumcision, or engagement to observe the law of Moses; but they must leave their dear infants without, as so many unclean heathen! A cruel supposition! But what would the Jews have thought if they had been taught such a doctrine? Would they have been silent, if the apostles had said, “Hitherto, indeed, your children, even in their infancy, have enjoyed the privilege of church-members; but the state of matters is now changed, and no such account can be made of them, till they grow up, and come forward with a profession

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xix. 5.



of their own faith." If the enemies of the Gospel had got such a handle as this, they would not have neglected it. And the believing Jews, who were so alarmed at a report that Paul had forbidden those of the dispersion to circumcise their children,<sup>1</sup> must have been much more alarmed, if they had been told that their children now were not to be accounted church-members at all. But we hear of no quarrel on that head, not the least murmur, either by believing or unbelieving Jews ;—a convincing proof that the privilege of infants stood as before.

3. In the New Testament, the continued privilege of infants as members of the visible church is plainly taught. Our Lord himself asserts it most expressly, as is recorded by three of the Evangelists, Matth. xix. 14 ; Mark. x. 14 ; Luke, xviii. 16 :—" Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." This is such a plain assertion of the privilege of infants as church-members, that one would think any illustration of it superfluous. But as the interest of an hypothesis has produced various exceptions against this proof, it is necessary to take some notice of them.

*First*, It has been alleged, that the children here mentioned were not *infants*, but grown up, and capable of being taught, or even of professing their faith in Christ. But if this had been the case, the disciples would have deserved a rebuke still more severe for offering to prevent any from getting access to Christ,

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xxi. 21.



who were capable of profiting by his doctrine. The only way in which their conduct can be accounted for, is, by supposing that the children were not yet capable of this, and the disciples, therefore, thought it a pity that their Master should be troubled with them. Besides, Mark tells us, that Jesus *took them in his arms*; and Luke says expressly, that they were *infants*, chap. xviii. 15,—“ And they brought unto him also *infants*, that he would touch them.” *Secondly*, It has been alleged, that all that is here intimated, is only that the members of the kingdom of God are *like* little children; and, in support of this allegation, the following words are appealed to, where Jesus intimates that we must receive the kingdom of God with the humility and submission of a child. And it is very true, that when our Lord is speaking of little children, he takes occasion to hold them out as examples of humility and submission; but it would be absurd to argue from this, that he says nothing else about them. Nor could it be any sufficient reason for their being admitted to him, and for his laying hands on them, and blessing them, that the members of the church were somewhat like them in spirit and disposition. The members of the church are compared to sheep and to doves; but did Jesus ever act so to these creatures, or speak so concerning them.

Great stress is also laid upon the word *such*, and that our Lord does not say “ of *these*,” but “ of *such* is the kingdom of God.” But the expression includes these, and the word *such* is used, because these were not the only members of the kingdom. It is the same as if he had said, “ do not forbid them, because they are *in-*

*fants*, for such belong to the kingdom of God.” When the apostle says to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. vi. 11, “ *such* were some of you,” he does not mean only that some of them had been *like* the idolaters mentioned immediately before ; but he asserts that they really had been idolaters, &c. So here our Lord does not assert merely that infants are like church-members, but that they really are so ; and therefore, it was wrong to deny access to these infants.

It is further urged, that this text is no proof of the church-state of infants, because it is the state of glory in heaven that is here meant by the kingdom of God. If the state of glory be here meant, and the salvation of infants here asserted, it would afford, at least, a strong presumption that they ought to be acknowledged as members of the church. It is through the outer court that there is entrance to the inner. But it is most usual, when the kingdom of God is mentioned, that the reference is made to its external and visible state in this world, especially when there is an assertion of the interest that certain individuals have in it. To suppose that our Lord asserted that all infants enter into the kingdom of glory, is without any warrant from Scripture ; and to suppose that he asserted this of these infants, is equally groundless ; for who are to enter into glory, is one of these secret things that belong to God, and not among the things revealed to us.

4. That the infants of church-members are partakers of the same privileges, is proved from their having the character peculiar to church-members

ascribed to them. They are expressly called *holy*, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband : else were your children unclean ; but now are they *holy*." <sup>1</sup> The holiness here meant is that which belongs to the members of the visible church as opposed to, and distinguished from, the heathen, or them that belong not to the church, and who are, therefore, called "unclean." Under the Old Testament, all the members of the church were called "holy," and the members of the church under the New Testament are described by the same characters. On the contrary, such as are not church-members are called "unclean," and, accordingly, under the Old Testament, all that were uncircumcised were held to be unclean, "There shall no more come unto thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." <sup>2</sup> For some time after the erection of the New Testament church, the Jews still reckoned all unclean who were not circumcised, and would not own them, nor hold communion with them, as church-members ; and it was only by a vision and immediate revelation from God that Peter was taught, "that he should not call any man common or unclean." <sup>3</sup> The dubiety Peter was under was not about the inward purity and holiness of Cornelius, but whether he could have intercourse with him as a church-member, or must hold him as unclean because of the want of circumcision. Now, the holiness and uncleanness mentioned by Paul is to be understood in the same

Cor vii. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. lii. 1.<sup>3</sup> Acts, x. 28.

sense as expressing, the one term, the privilege of church-members, and the other the contrary.

Further, if we consider the scope of the passage, and the occasion on which the apostle makes such a declaration of the holiness of children, it will more fully appear that he asserts their privilege as church-members. It seems that some of the members of the church of Corinth entertained doubts about the lawfulness of living in the marriage state with infidels ; and they were the rather in doubt about this, because the Jews were not only prohibited to marry heathens, but were obliged to put away their heathen wives whom they had married, “ and such as were born of them.”<sup>1</sup> But the apostle tells them, that however improper it was for Christians to enter into that relation with infidels, it was not unlawful to continue in it after it was formed ; nor were they bound, when brought to the knowledge of the truth, to forsake the other party, who yet remained in a state of infidelity. If the law enjoined upon the Jews had been binding on them to put away their wives for infidelity, or upon the wives to forsake their husbands, then their children also must have been excluded from the privilege of church-members, and treated as unclean heathens ; but the case was now otherwise ; they were “ holy,” even though one of the parents remained in a state of infidelity.

This view of the text appears perfectly natural, and agreeable to the scope of the context ; nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Ezra, x. 3.

it has been keenly contested. It is contended, that what is here said about the children respects their legitimacy, and is only an assertion that they were not bastards. But there was no reason for supposing that the infidelity of either of the parents could affect the legitimacy of the children. If the marriage was lawful according to the common principles of morality, and agreeable to the laws of civil society, the legitimacy of the children could not have been called in question, although both the parents had been infidels. Besides, it would be a very preposterous method to prove the lawfulness of the marriage by the legitimacy of the children, instead of proving the legitimacy of the children by the lawfulness of the marriage. In short, there is no question here, at all, about marriage and the legitimacy of children, with respect to civil society. The only question is about the state and conduct of church-members as such—whether or not, according to the law of the Jewish church, the believing husband or wife were obliged to forsake the other party on account of infidelity? And the apostle shews them, that if they were under such a law, it would exclude their children from the privilege of church-members, as it did among the Jews; and his arguing the point from the absurdity of this supposition, is a convincing proof that the church privilege of infants was a point established, and out of question among them.

Again, it is urged, that if we consider the holiness ascribed to the children as an assertion of their being church-members, we must also admit that the infidel husband or wife of a believer is also a church-member;



for such are said to be sanctified. This objection is no way formidable. The same word, according as it is applied to different objects, admits of a different interpretation, and may apply to one object in a latitude of meaning in which it will not apply to another. "Every creature" is said to be "sanctified" to the believer;<sup>1</sup> but it would be very absurd to suppose, that every creature is holy in the same sense that true Christians, or even church-members, are holy. The holiness of church-members cannot be ascribed to the unbelieving husband or wife, while avowing their infidelity; but no such objection can be against the child of a believer. And if sanctification be ascribed to every creature in reference to the believer, it is easy to understand how these relatives are said to be sanctified, notwithstanding their infidelity.

5. It may be added, as another proof of the church-state and privilege of infants, that the church under the New Testament is addressed as consisting of infants, or children under age. The epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians are addressed to church-members, and children are addressed, who are yet to be brought up under the discipline and nurture of their parents.<sup>2</sup> It is true, that children in early infancy are not capable of understanding that address, or of yielding the obedience which it enjoins; but they may be capable of this, in a considerable degree, long before they can make such a profession of their faith as to be the ground of their admission into the church,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. vi. 1, 4.



if they had been aliens. Now, as the apostle, by the Spirit of God, enjoins duties upon children as *church-members*, they are to be treated as such. Children are to have respect to the character of their parents as church-members, and to obey them *in the Lord*.<sup>1</sup> In like manner, parents are to have a respect to the privilege of their children, as laying them under obligation to “train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” And not only are parents, but the church is under obligation to children as church-members, with reference to instruction, admonition, rebuke, and other instances of discipline, even before they can be admitted members by their own profession of faith; and to refuse that they are members, is to deprive them, in some degree at least, of the benefit of the discipline of the church. For what has the church to do to judge them that are without?

<sup>1</sup> See the import of the expression, Rom. xvi. 2; Philip. ii. 29.

## ESSAY X.



INFANT BAPTISM WARRANTED BY THE WORD OF  
GOD.<sup>1</sup>

THE doctrine and practice of infant-baptism have of late met with much opposition in this country ; and those who have not carefully examined the subject are in danger of being led away by the specious objections that are raised, and industriously propagated. To state, therefore, some of the Scripture-grounds upon which infant-baptism is pleaded for and practised, may not be unprofitable. It is only a brief statement and illustration of these that will suit a publication of this kind ; and this also may be more advantageous to many readers who might be distracted by long illustrations.

1. We shall begin with the commission Christ gave to his apostles, as containing the warrant and direction of their ministry in this matter, Matth. xxviii. 19, 20. “ Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. p. 410.

Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” But here, in the very entry, we are stopped short by the opponents of infant-baptism, and the words of this text are urged as a sufficient argument against it. They tell us, that the commission is, “go teach and baptize.” Infants cannot be taught, at least in early infancy, and therefore ought not to be baptized. A little attention to the words will shew, that there is no reason to triumph in this objection. Some degree of teaching is, indeed, previously necessary in the case of adults, who are admitted to baptism upon a profession of their faith; but this is no proof that infants cannot be otherwise admitted. Nor does the text intimate that teaching must always go before baptism, any more than it intimates that baptism must always precede teaching. In our translation, the word *teach* is mentioned before baptism, and it is mentioned again after it. But the word rendered *to teach*, in the beginning of verse 19, is of a more general signification. It signifies to make disciples, and the words might be rendered, if our language would admit, “go and disciple all nations.” This expresses the matter of their commission more generally. It was to gather in all nations to be disciples to Christ; and the words that follow explain how this was to be done; it was by baptizing them, and instructing them in the will of Christ,—teaching them to observe all that he commanded. The words declare that they were to be, by baptism, solemnly admitted among the disciples of Christ, and taught the knowledge and observance of his will. In some cases, namely, with

adults, part of this instruction properly would precede baptism, and more of it would still be required after baptism, to train them up as the disciples of Christ ; but it would be altogether unreasonable to argue from this, that infants could not be admitted among Christ's disciples, to be trained up in his school. Nay, the apostles must have considered their commission as extending to infants, unless there had been some restriction that excluded them. While they saw such an extension of the objects of their ministry in one respect, they could not suppose, unless it had been expressed, a limitation in another respect. They were not aware, for a time, that the Gentiles were to be admitted into the church, without circumcision, previous to baptism, but, whatever might be the manner of their admission, they must have understood that their infant-children were to be admitted along with them. Such was the rule already established in the admission of Gentile proselytes. As the apostles knew that infants hitherto had been acknowledged as members of the church, and admitted to circumcision ; as they also knew that when any of the Gentiles were admitted, their children were circumcised and admitted along with them, nothing but an express intimation to the contrary, could have prevented them from considering infants as included in that commission to baptize, which they now received.

2. This view of the apostles' commission is confirmed by their practice in the execution of it. But here we are told, that, among the many thousands baptized by the apostles, or under their directions, we

have no express mention of any one infant. It should, however, be remembered, that the mention of infants was as unnecessary in the record of their practice as in their commission ; but wherein there was an extension of baptism beyond circumcision, that is particularly recorded, by the express mention of the baptism of females, Lydia and others.<sup>1</sup> It should also be attended to, that, though we read of the baptism of multitudes at Jerusalem, at Samaria, &c., there are very few instances recorded of the baptism of individuals, or very few persons whose baptism is particularly mentioned. And as to several of these, there is a plain reference to their children as baptized also along with them. Of nine instances wherein the baptism of individuals is mentioned, there is also mention of the families of four of them ; of the other five, we have no assurance how many had families, and some of them we are sure had none. The four families mentioned are those of Cornelius, Acts, x. ; of the jailer and Lydia, Acts, xvi. ; and Stephanas, 1 Cor. i. 16. Now, considering that, among so few particular instances on record concerning baptism, four of them respect whole families, it must be a weighty reason, indeed, that would prevent us from considering infants as included. It is contended, that all the members of these families were adult persons, and admitted to baptism upon their own profession of faith in Christ. But this is what is called begging the question, taking for granted what should be proved ; and it leaves no particular reason for the mention of their families more

<sup>1</sup> Acts, viii. 12 ; xvi. 15.

than of others, their friends and neighbours, who also were admitted to baptism upon the profession of their faith. Such mention is made of the baptism of families as cannot admit of this construction. There is mention of a baptism of the family connected with the profession and baptism of the parent ; but the baptism of adult persons, proceeding on their own profession, is not so connected. It is granted that among the company convened in the house of Cornelius, there were friends and acquaintances, as well as household servants and devout soldiers, who were baptized in consequence of their own profession ; but it is probable, there were others admitted through their relation to him. He was informed, that Peter, whom he was directed to send for, would tell him words, whereby he and all his house should be saved.<sup>1</sup> Now, unless this had respect to some in his house, who were to be admitted into the church, and to baptism, through their relation to him, there was nothing said about their privilege more than would apply to all the people of Cesarea.

This is farther confirmed by what is said concerning the Philippian jailer and his family, Acts, xvi. 31-33. There were adult persons in his house, to whom the Word of God was preached, verse 32, and of them a profession of faith would be required, previous to their baptism ; but the expression used will by no means prove that there were none other in his house but persons of that description. Universal terms cannot be extended further than the nature of the subject

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xi. 14.



admits. The apostle "spake the word to all in his house" who were capable of hearing it; but, to infer from the expression used, that there were none in the house besides these, would be very false reasoning. But the strength of the argument contained in this passage does not lie in conjectures and probabilities as to the state of his family, that it included infants, and not adults only. The apostles plainly intimate, verse 31, that benefit would result to his family from the profession of his faith; "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thy house." To say that this only intimated that the several members of his family would also be saved, if they believed in Christ, cannot account for the expression used, as this was equally applicable to all that heard the Gospel, and had no connection with his faith, and the profession of it. It is objected, that if this intimated some privilege peculiar to his family, as resulting from his faith, it would say, that children may be saved by the faith of their parents. There is no room here for an enquiry into the connection between the faith of the parents and the salvation of their infant-seed, or rather the connection between the external dispensation of the covenant, and a saving interest, in the case of infants, who do not by unbelief reject the covenant. And there is no necessity for entering into any such enquiry. It is foreign to the present question. When the apostles admitted the jailer to baptism upon the profession of his faith, they did not proceed upon a judgment about the reality of his faith, or his state of salvation before God. In like manner, an admission of his children to baptism, was no determination of

their spiritual state as before God : but their external privilege as God's covenant-people is asserted as connected with his own. And this rule of God's covenant was carefully intimated as extending to all sorts of persons. When the Jews were admitted to baptism, they were told that "the promise was to them and to their children." When devout worshippers of God, such as Cornelius and Lydia, were admitted to the privileges of the covenant, the extension of the covenant-privilege to their families was also intimated. And that it might appear there was no exception, even in the case of idolatrous Gentiles who were brought to faith in Christ, the apostles are careful also to intimate to the jailer the privilege of his house.

3. The baptism of infants is necessarily connected with their privilege as members of the visible church. This is a truth so generally, if not universally admitted, that those who oppose the baptism of infants also deny that they are church-members ; for if they admit the latter, they must also admit the former. That the infant-children of professed Christians are, as well as their parents, members of the visible church, or that, as to this matter, we are to make the same account of the children as of their parents, is proved in a former Essay,<sup>1</sup> to which we refer. Now, all church-members are to be solemnly admitted by baptism ; and as soon as we are satisfied that any are to be acknowledged as members, there can be no reasonable doubt about their being baptized. This is evident from Peter's reason-

<sup>1</sup> Essay IX.

ing concerning Cornelius and his friends. He was at first in doubt whether any could be received as members of the church, and admitted to baptism, who were uncircumcised; but when he saw the miraculous gift of the Spirit conferred upon them, he was fully convinced of their right to be received, and said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we?"<sup>1</sup> And in the same way he justifies himself, when afterwards challenged on this affair: Acts. xi. 17. "Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?" The point ascertained by the miraculous gift of the Spirit conferred upon Cornelius and his friends, was not their spiritual state in the sight of God, for miraculous gifts were no certain evidence of this; but it was, that they were to be acknowledged and received as church-members; and this being ascertained, there could be no further hesitation about their baptism. In like manner, seeing the word of God warrants us to acknowledge these infants to be members of the church, whose parents, one or both, are so, it is altogether unreasonable to deny their right to baptism: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized."

4. The right of infants, born of church-members, to baptism, may be argued from the interest they have in God's covenant, of which baptism is a seal. We do not here speak of a special and saving interest, for

<sup>1</sup> Acts, x. 47.

of that the church can form no certain judgment in the case of any, whether adults or infants ; nor is any thing of that nature the rule of admission to the privileges of the visible church ; but the interest here intended is that which is common to all the members of the visible church, and that about which a certain judgment can be formed, according to the rule of the Word. Adult persons, upon a serious profession of taking hold of God's covenant, have a right to be acknowledged as God's covenant-people ; and the same account is to be made of their infant-children, according to the tenor of the covenant-promise. If, when they grow up, they professedly or practically renounce it, a different account must be made of them ; but in their infant-state they are, with their parents, to be held and reputed as in covenant with God, and to be admitted to the seal of it accordingly. For if an interest in the covenant proves a right to baptism in the case of adults, it must also do so in the case of infants.<sup>1</sup> To this it is objected, that the Lord's Supper is a seal of the covenant as well as baptism ; and if the interest that infants have in the covenant proves their right to baptism, it must also prove their right of admission to the Lord's Supper. But, although both these ordinances are seals of the covenant, they are not exactly parallel in all respects. Baptism being a sign and token of admission into God's covenant, and ingrafting into Christ, which are properly God's act and work, does not necessarily suppose such exercise on our part

<sup>1</sup> Acts, ii. 38, 39.

as is required to the right observation of the Lord's Supper. To this it is required, that a man should examine himself, and that, in communicating, he remember the Lord's death, and discern the Lord's body. By baptism, persons are indeed entered among Christ's disciples, to be trained up by the means of grace in his church; but this does not imply a right to immediate admission to every privilege. Even adult persons may have such knowledge of the first principles of religion as may justify their admission to baptism, while yet farther instruction, and improvement thereby, may be necessary for their admission to the Lord's Supper.

5. The warrantableness of infant-baptism may be argued from the circumcision of infants under the Old Testament. Baptism and circumcision are ordinances exactly parallel and correspondent to one another; and no objection can be stated against infant-baptism, that will not apply with equal force against infant-circumcision. To elude the force of the argument drawn from circumcision, various objections have been urged. Some tell us, that circumcision was peculiar to the Sinaitic covenant, and no way parallel to any Gospel ordinance. It had, indeed, a relation to that covenant, but was not peculiar to it. Circumcision was not of Moses, but of the fathers;<sup>1</sup> and was enjoined and practised 400 years before the Sinaitic covenant, as such, had a being. It is farther contended, that circumcision was peculiar to the natural seed of

<sup>1</sup> John, vii. 22.



Abraham, and was a token of their carnal descent, and of their right to the earthly inheritance. But all this is groundless supposition, and contrary to fact. All the natural seed of Abraham, and particularly the Ishmaelites and Edomites, did not continue in the covenant, and accordingly had nothing to do with circumcision as the token of it; while many others, who had no relation to Abraham by the flesh, were admitted into the covenant by circumcision; yet this gave them no title to inheritance in the land of Canaan. The children of Israel were bound to admit strangers into the covenant by circumcision, and to allow them a sojourning among them, that they might enjoy the ordinances of worship; but they were not bound to admit them to a share of their family inheritance. Circumcision was an ordinance, in every essential respect, parallel to baptism. It was the initiating seal of God's covenant, as exhibited to Abraham and the ancient church. That covenant, in its principal matter and substance, is the same which is now exhibited in the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> And so far from being abolished, it is confirmed by Christ, that the Gentiles might be brought into the benefit of it. Rom. xv. 8, 9, "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy." Christ was made under the law of circumcision, and his ministry belonged to the covenant of circumcision, in order to confirm the promises of that covenant, and make way for the admission of the

<sup>1</sup> See Essay IV. on the Abrahamic Covenant, p. 142.



Gentiles into it ; and the promise they were admitted to was just that made to the fathers, and confirmed by Christ, "I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed." Circumcision was in several respects suitable to the exhibition of the covenant unto the fathers ; baptism is an ordinance more suitable to the exhibition of the covenant now ; but it was as really a seal of the covenant of grace then, as baptism is under the New Testament. Circumcision, accordingly, had the same spiritual signification with baptism, and exhibited the same blessings. Is baptism a token of our communion with Christ for the blessings of justification and sanctification ? Circumcision, in like manner, was a seal of the righteousness of faith ;<sup>1</sup> and it signified the circumcision of the heart, or the putting away the filth of the flesh.<sup>2</sup> Thus, after all the noise that has been made about the supposed carnality of circumcision, and the spirituality of the ordinance of baptism, there is in reality no material difference between them. They are both external signs, having the same use and end, and the same spiritual signification.

6. The argument drawn from circumcision, in support of the doctrine of infant-baptism, amounts to full demonstration, when it is considered, not only that baptism is parallel to circumcision, but that it is actually substituted in the room of it. That it is so, is evident from those passages of Scripture where baptism is mentioned as superseding the necessity of circumcision. The Galatians were sadly entangled with

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii. 28, 29.

the corrupt doctrine of some false teachers, and thought that it was necessary that they should be circumcised, and observe the law of Moses. But the apostle shews them that they had all spiritual privileges by faith in Christ, and could not have them by the works of the law ; and that they had no need of circumcision to exhibit and seal these blessings to them, as this was done by their baptism, Gal. iii. 26, 28. “ Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ. For there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Here baptism is expressly mentioned as the sign and seal of union to Christ, and of communion with him ; and it is mentioned with such an allusion to circumcision, as to shew our superior privilege by having baptism in the place of it. Circumcision was confined to the Jews, and to a few proselytes that joined the commonwealth of Israel ; but baptism is extended to all nations. Bondmen were not circumcised but by the allowance and direction of their masters ; but under the Gospel, slaves are freely admitted to baptism. Males only were circumcised, but males and females are equally the subjects of baptism. The Gentile converts had, therefore, no reason to regret the want of circumcision.

A similar passage we have, Coloss. ii. 10, 12. “ And ye are complete in him,—in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, being buried with him in bap-

tism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Here the apostle shews these Gentile converts, that they had no reason to complain for the want of external circumcision, as they had that which is spiritual by the circumcision of Christ, or that which is by the merit of his mediation and the efficacy of his Spirit. They might, however, object to this, that believers of old had the spiritual circumcision as well as they, and had, besides, the external, to exhibit this to their faith, and to confirm their faith concerning it. But, in answer to this objection, the apostle refers to their baptism, as a sign and seal of their communion with Christ in his death and resurrection. But this would have been no sufficient answer, unless baptism had come in the room of circumcision, and supplied its place. Now, as baptism comes in the place of circumcision, it is absurd to suppose that it should be more limited in its object. While the privilege of the church is in many respects extended, it is unreasonable to suppose that infants should have been admitted to circumcision, and denied admission to the privilege of baptism.

It might now be proper to take some notice of the objections which have been brought against the doctrine and practice of infant-baptism. Some of these have been already obviated, some others shall be briefly considered.

It has been urged, that, as we cannot form a judgment about the covenant-state of infants, we cannot safely admit them to the seal of the covenant. If

this objection refers to a saving interest in the covenant, it proceeds upon the false principle already exposed, viz. that the admission of persons to the privileges of the visible church, is to proceed upon a judgment about their spiritual state as it is before God.<sup>1</sup> If the objection refers only to that covenant-state which is common to the members of the visible church, the Word of God gives sufficient direction for a judgment concerning it.

It is argued, that faith is expressly required to a saving interest in the covenant, and a profession of faith, which infants cannot give, is requisite in order to admission to baptism; Mark, xvi. 16,—“He that believeth, and is baptised, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” But it is quite wrong to extend that rule to the case of infants, which has a respect only to adults; and in doing so, we would as really exclude infants from salvation as from baptism, because, in the case of adults, faith and profession are as necessary to the former as to the latter. Besides, the objection, if just, would be every whit as forcible against infant-circumcision as against infant-baptism. Faith and profession were as really required under the covenant of circumcision, as they are under the covenant of baptism.

In a word, it is contended, that baptism can be of no use to infants, and that it is a mere unmeaning ceremony, as they are incapable of understanding what is therein represented, or of improving it for spiritual purposes. But this objection is too bold and pre-

<sup>1</sup> See Essay I. on the Visible Church, p. 97.

sumptuous. Shall we take upon us to arraign the wisdom of God in his ordinances? Would not all the ordinances of God be set aside as impertinent and useless, if carnal reason be set up as the judge? If any shall ask, what good can baptism do to an infant? may it not be asked, with equal propriety, what benefit could infants receive from circumcision? Or what benefit could infants receive by Christ's laying his hands on them, and blessing them?<sup>1</sup> Is it a matter of no account to infants, that God acknowledges them as his covenant-people, and has appointed such a solemn testimony and token of it, confirming their privilege as members of his church? Is it of no account to them that their parents and the church are hereby laid under great obligation to train them up in the fear of the Lord? May they not have great benefit by their baptism as a means of faith, when duly instructed concerning it, even in early infancy, and long before they could be supposed capable of such a profession as the church could proceed upon in their admission? May it not be a great comfort to them, even in an advanced period of life, to reflect how early God took notice of them, and made them to hope, or gave them ground of hope, when on their mother's breast? Surely, the Psalmist speaks of something like this as a matter of great comfort, Psal. xxii. 9 10. "Thou didst make me to hope when I was upon my mother's breast. I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou art my God from my mother's belly." Let us beware of slighting any instance of God's goodness and condescension.

<sup>1</sup> Mark, x. 16.



## ESSAY XI.

THE MODE OF BAPTISM.<sup>1</sup>

TO the summary of evidence for Infant-Baptism given in the preceding Essay, it may be proper to subjoin some observations concerning the MODE of baptism. Those who practise infant-baptism generally hold that baptism is rightly dispensed by sprinkling or pouring water upon the person baptized. On the other hand, the opponents of infant-baptism generally, if not universally, contend that the only warrantable mode is that of immersing, dipping, or plunging the whole body under water ; and this mode they consider to be so essential to the ordinance, that there can be no baptism otherwise. An examination of the grounds of this latter opinion is now proposed ; and if these are found insufficient, the former opinion will need no justification.

The arguments offered to prove the absolute necessity of performing baptism by immersion, or dipping and covering the body with water, are reducible to three

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. vii. p. 453.



heads, viz. such as are taken from the signification of the word ; such as are drawn from the accounts we have of baptism in the New Testament ; and such as are drawn from supposed allusions in Scripture to that mode of baptism. The arguments which have been urged on either side, taken from the practice of the church after the days of the apostles, shall be waved, not only because of uncertainty as to matter of fact, but also because, whatever be the fact, no argument drawn from it can come in competition with that which is derived from Scripture history.

1. It is alleged, that immersion, or dipping of the body in water so as to cover it, is necessarily implied in the word that is used ; and, that unless this be done, it cannot be called baptism. But, even though it were admitted that such was the primary signification of the word, it does not follow, that this idea must always be retained in every instance where it is applied. It is well known that, in every language, there is by custom with respect to many words, a great departure from the original signification. Besides, it is extremely difficult to fix precisely the meaning of any word in a dead language, or to find a word in another language that will exactly correspond with it in signification. Hence, in this case, the most of translations have retained the Greek word, as applied to the ordinance under consideration. The advocates for dipping or immersion are, however, positive that this is certainly implied in the Greek word *baptizo* ; that the signification of the primitive word *bapto*, from which it is derived, is a confirmation of this ; and that it is further confirmed

by the signification of the Hebrew word *tabal*, of which *bapto* or *baptizo* in the Greek is a proper translation. But, though it were admitted that these words were frequently, or even generally, applied to cases of immersion, or dipping in some fluid, so as to cover the body dipped; yet, if they also be applied to other cases, or if there be but one instance of a different signification, the whole argument goes for nothing.

The Hebrew word *tabal* primarily signifies to stain or tinge a body with some colouring matter; and, as that is ordinarily done by wetting the body in some coloured fluid, the word comes to be applied to the wetting of a body with any fluid, without respect to staining or colouring. The word is, in our translation, ordinarily rendered by the word *dip*, as that is a very common method of staining or wetting any substance; and it is likely, that in some instances, where the word is used, a thorough dipping or immersion is intended; but there are instances, where there is a probability, if not a certainty, on the other side. It is probable that Hazael when he went to smother his master with a wet cloth, immersed it in water as the readiest and most effectual method of wetting it; and, therefore, there is a propriety in using the word *dip* in our translation.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the word *tabal* is used in a case wherein it is very improbable that dipping was used, especially a total immersion. When Joseph's brethren stained his coat with blood, in order to make their father believe that a wild beast had destroyed

him,<sup>1</sup> it is not rational to suppose that it was wholly immersed in the blood, as, in that case, the deception would not have been effectual. None could believe that the tearing of a wild beast could have drenched his whole garment with his blood. There are other instances of the use of this word, in which it is properly enough rendered by the word *dip*, without implying, however, a total immersion; as when the priest dipped his finger in the blood, in order to the sprinkling of it; or, when the bunch of hyssop was dipped in the water of purification for the same purpose. A total immersion was not necessary in either of these cases. When the priest took a little oil in the hollow of his hand, and *dipped* his finger therein,<sup>2</sup> it is evident there could not be a total immersion, such as is pleaded for in baptism. When, at the passage of Jordan, we are told that the feet of the priests bearing the ark were *dipped* in the brim of the water,<sup>3</sup> this can mean no more than that their feet were wet by touching the water; and there is no reason to think that they were covered by it.

The word *bapto* in the Greek is nearly of the same signification. It signifies to wet and stain, but it does not always signify dipping, much less a total immersion. The Septuagint translation uses this word to express what we render *wet*; Dan. iv. 33,—“His body was wet with the dew of heaven.” It would be improper to say that his body was dipped or immersed in the dew. It also signifies to stain or *wet* by sprinkling, Rev. xix.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxxvii. 31.    <sup>2</sup> Lev. xiv. 16.    <sup>3</sup> Josh. iii. 15.

13. The glorious warrior there described is said to appear in a vesture *dipped* in blood; but it is evident, that the allusion is to a conqueror, whose raiment is stained by the blood of his enemies; and he does not take off his garments and dip them in the blood, but the blood is sprinkled by their slaughter. And that it is a wetting and staining by sprinkling, and not by dipping, that is here meant, is evident from the parallel passage in Isa. lxiii. 3,—“ Their blood (or gore) shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.”

Let us come to the words *baptizo* and *baptismos*, which are the terms used in reference to the ordinance under consideration; and these terms no more imply immersion than the others already considered. They intimate, in the literal sense, a washing or purification by water, but they determine nothing about the mode of its application. As the question here is concerning the mode of external baptism, it is not so necessary to take up time in considering the instances wherein the word is used metaphorically; such as, when we read of “ baptism by sufferings and death,” or the “ baptism in the cloud, and in the sea.”<sup>1</sup> Nor is it necessary to inquire into the meaning of the word, when applied in a spiritual sense, respecting “ the baptism of the Spirit;” although, if the idea of immersion is necessarily implied in the word, it must, in some degree, belong to every application of it. External baptism is a washing or purification by water; but the mode of

<sup>1</sup> Luke, xii. 50; 1 Cor. x. 1-2.

application, whether by immersion in it, or otherwise, must be determined by other circumstances. The word is used with relation to some superstitious washings practised by the Jews in latter times. We are told, Luke, xi. 38, that a Pharisee, who had invited Jesus to dinner, “wondered that he washed not (literally, baptized not) before dinner.” There is no reason to suppose that this meant an immersion of the whole body in water, or that the omission which gave offence was any thing more than what the Pharisees, at another time, challenged in the disciples, that they went to “eat without washing their hands.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, that is called a baptism where only a small part of the body was wet with the water. Our opponents insist, that even here there was an immersion in part, because ordinarily the hands are washed by dipping them in the water. But are they sure that this was the only, or even the ordinary, mode among the Jews? There is as much reason to think that it was a common mode with them, to wash the hands by pouring water upon them. So Elisha is described, 2 Kings, iii. 11, as he that “poureth water upon the hands of Elijah.” We also read, Mark, vii. 4, that the Pharisees, when they came from the market, did not eat except they washed, or, as in the Greek, *baptized*; and that they held also the washings—in the Greek it is *baptisms*—of cups and pots of brazen vessels, and tables, or beds. These washings of persons, or utensils, are called baptisms, but there is no intimation of the mode in which that

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xv. 2; Mark, vii. 2.



washing was performed. Some of the articles might probably be immersed in the water, as the mode most convenient for them; but, for the same reason, it is as natural to suppose that some others, such as tables, beds, or sofas, would be washed in another manner.<sup>1</sup> As to quotations from the writings of the Rabbis, for proving that they used the word *tabal* to express these washings, they are of no account, as we have seen that this word determines nothing in favour of immersion.

The various washings and purifications which were enjoined in the law of Moses, are also called baptisms, Heb. ix. 10. The law had a respect to “meats and drinks, and *divers washings*.” In the Greek, it is

<sup>1</sup> [A late Baptist writer, Dr Carson, who has published a prodigious quantity of criticism on the word *baptizo*, and has contended, with a singular degree of arrogance and ostentation for the view of the term adopted by the Baptists, has gone so far as to assert, on the faith of immersion being the *only* meaning of the word, that the Jews actually *immersed their beds*! Rather than yield what the rules of common sense and all rational interpretation demand, that the term here must refer to a ceremonial lustration performed in any mode by the application of water, he declares himself ready to believe that they baptised their beds and couches by taking them to pieces, and plunging the articles in water! This ridiculous style of interpretation, in defence of which Dr Carson has invented a canon of his own, can only be accounted for from the fallacy into which he has fallen, and which pervades the whole of his criticisms, namely, that the word *baptizo* is synonymous in every point with the English word *dip*; and as this word has not come to have any *secondary* signification with us, irrespective of the mode of *dipping*, though it may have *figurative* meanings derived from the mode, he concludes that *baptism* is *just dipping*. Dr Moses Stuart has very satisfactorily shewn the absurdity of placing such weight on the meaning of the term, or on the external mode of baptism; in the American *Biblical Repository*, vol. iii. pp. 288–390.—ED.]



“baptisms.” This expression, even by itself, is a proof that immersion is not the only mode of baptism. These washings or baptisms referred to, were not only many, but “diverse,”<sup>1</sup> or different, in the mode of washing, as well as in other circumstances. Nor can it be contended, with any appearance of proof, that all these baptisms were performed by dipping the whole body in water. One of the most frequent was performed by sprinkling. In that way the water of separation was applied of which we have an account, Num. xix. Pollution by touching a dead body was very frequent, and it was necessary that the people should have a remedy at hand. The ashes of a heifer, sacrificed and burnt in the manner prescribed, were to be kept for the people, and, when occasion required, were mixed with water, which was sprinkled upon the unclean. And that this was one of those divers baptisms referred to by the apostle, is evident from the express mention he makes of it, Heb. ix. 13. “The blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, *sprinkling* the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh.” This is one clear instance of a baptism by sprinkling, and the advocates for immersion would find it very difficult to prove that any of these “divers baptisms” were performed in the way that they contend for.<sup>2</sup>

2. Those who plead that immersion, or dipping the whole body under water is essential to baptism,

<sup>1</sup> Διαφοραίς, compare Rom. xii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> [The cavils and evasions by which Carson and others have lately attempted to get over this obvious reasoning, would go to unsettle the plainest declarations of Scripture.—ED.]

argue from the accounts given of it as performed by John Baptist, and by the apostles of Christ. Their reasoning is founded upon the quantity of water supposed necessary, and upon the alleged signification of certain Greek prepositions used in the account we have of some instances of baptism.

A great ado is made about John's baptising in Jordan. We are told, and it is proved from the writings of the Rabbis, that Jordan was a great river, a river to swim in, and sufficient to carry boats and ships.<sup>1</sup> That Jordan was a large river, is abundantly evident from the Bible, and the waters of it were generally used by John for baptism in one way or another. If immersion was the mode, there was sufficient depth for it. But all that can be inferred from this amounts at most to a probability in favour of immersion; and surely our faith in the being of a divine ordinance cannot depend on a mere probability: yet it is contended, that unless there be an immersion, there is no baptism! The probability is, however, very small, notwithstanding all that is said about the largeness of that river. John exercised his ministry in the wilderness, in the neighbourhood of Jordan, and its waters afforded great conveniency for baptising the multitudes that attended him. Let it therefore be granted that the plenty of water in Jordan was a reason for his exercising his ministry in its neighbourhood. That is given as a reason for his baptizing at Enon; John iii. 23. "John was baptizing in Enon, near to Salim, because there

<sup>1</sup> See Gill on Matth. iii. 6.

was much water," or rather, "*many waters.*" It was a place of springs or wells, as the name signifies. But all this affords no great probability that he baptized by immersion, when it is considered what multitudes he had to baptize, and how convenient a river or stream was for the baptism of a multitude. Matt. iii. 5. "There went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." Let it also be remembered, that in the wilderness and in the plain country near to Jordan, the water was not plentiful in streams and rivulets, so that the people had to seek a supply by digging pits. Jacob's well at Samaria was of this kind.<sup>1</sup> And the Baptist would have made slow progress with the multitudes he baptized, if he had not had a better supply than such wells could afford.

But we will be told, that the proof of baptism by immersion will be found decisive, if we attend to some little words called prepositions, which are used in the accounts we have of baptism, such as *in*, *into*, *out of*, &c. John's disciples were baptized *in* Jordan, *in* the river Jordan, Matt. iii. 6, Mark i. 5; Jesus was baptized *in* Jordan, Mark i. 9; he came up *out of* the water, ver. 10. It is rather provoking that such masters of the Greek language as can find immersion necessarily implied in the word *baptizo*, should all at once drop their Greek, and avail themselves of English prepositions, and of the common translation, to support a favourite opinion. The Greek prepositions in the texts mentioned are, *εν*, *εις*, *απο*, and every one who looks into the Greek

Testament must see, that each of these admits of a different translation, according to the subject to which it is applied, or the circumstances to which it relates ; and that no English preposition will invariably convey the meaning of any of them, in all places where it occurs. The disciples of John were baptized in (ἐν) Jordan, in (ἐν) the river Jordan. But, granting the propriety of this translation, immersion is not proved. They might go a little into the edge of the river, for the conveniency of being baptized, without being plunged into it. Besides, the word is frequently translated *with*, and might be so here, signifying that they were baptized with the waters of Jordan ; and in this way it is translated, Matt. iii. 11. This preposition is also frequently rendered *at*, as in Luke, ix. 31. Jesus “accomplished his decease *at*,” not *in* Jerusalem, for “he suffered without the gate.” It should also be so rendered, John, i. 28 ; iii. 23. It was *at*, not properly *in*, Bethabara and Enon, that John was baptizing. Another preposition used is εἰς which is rendered *to*, *into*, *unto*, and *at*. Of this last there are several instances. It is very rare that it can be rendered *in*, so that it would be a better translation of Mark, i. 9, to read “that Jesus came from Nazareth, and was baptized of John *at* Jordan.” We must not overlook the expression used, Matth. iii. 16. It is said that Jesus “went up *out of* the water.” From this it is argued, in this manner, “that since it is said that he *came up out of the water*, he must first have gone down into it, must have been in it, and was baptized in it ; a circum-

stance strongly in favour of baptism by immersion.”<sup>1</sup> Did the commentator not know that the Greek preposition here used is *απο*, which is ordinarily translated *from*, and rarely otherwise? And what will this prove in favour of immersion? The expression only intimates, that as he went to the water for being baptized, so, when that was done, he removed from it; and that as water always lies in a hollow, when he went to it, he had to go *down*, and to come *up*, when he removed from it. So that all this determines nothing as to the mode of baptism, whether it was immersion or sprinkling. The same observations will apply to the expressions used relative to the baptism of the Eunuch, Acts, viii. 38, 39. “They went down both *into* the water, both Philip and the Eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up *out of* the water,” &c. The prepositions here used are *εις* and *εκ*. The first is translated *to*, as often as otherwise, and the other is also often translated *from*, which is one of its significations given in the Lexicons; so that no one could have challenged the translation, if it run thus: They went down both *to* the water—and when they were come up *from* the water,” &c. At any rate, if these expressions prove that the Eunuch was immersed in the water, they must prove also that Philip was immersed; for, what is said about going down to the water, and coming up from it, is applied to both; and there is nothing to intimate that the one was more in the water than the other. But, if we consider where the Eunuch was baptized, it will appear that there is little reason to suppose it was

<sup>1</sup> Gill in locum



done by immersion. It was in the desert near to Gaza, where, instead of finding a river or pool to bathe in, it is rare to see a small stream, or even a drop of water, upon the face of the earth. Where it is found, it is only in small quantity, and the way in which mention is made of the water wherewith the Eunuch was baptized, confirms this. "As they went on they came to a certain water—it should be rendered—to *some water*, and the Eunuch said, See, here is water." Thus, in all the history we have of baptism in the New Testament, there is not a shadow of proof that it was performed by immersion; and when we consider the great multitudes that were baptized in a short space of time, by John, and by his disciples, the probability is strongly in favour of a different mode.<sup>1</sup>

3. Another argument which the advocates for immersion consider as of great weight, is founded on some supposed allusions in Scripture to that mode of baptism. The passages particularly urged are Rom. vi. 3, 4. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death; therefore we are buried with him in (or rather by) baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection," Col. ii. 12. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him,

<sup>1</sup> [These criticisms have been fully confirmed by the learned researches of Dr Stuart in the article formerly referred to, *Biblical Repository*, vol. iii. p. 319, &c.—ED.]



through the faith of the operation of God who raised him from the dead." Here, say they, there is a plain allusion to the mode of baptism by immersion. The burial of the body under water represents our being buried with Christ, and the rising of the body out of the water represents our resurrection with Christ. But this is a groundless fancy, which tends to pervert the nature and design of the ordinance. The sacraments are appointed to exhibit spiritual blessings, and not to represent external things, and therefore there is no reason to suppose that such a mode of baptism was appointed as might resemble a burial, and a rising out of a grave, any more than we can suppose that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should resemble a crucifixion. And if we must have a resemblance of that nature, why do they not plead for some mode of baptism that will resemble the death of Christ; for we are said to be "baptized into his death" as well as "buried with him in baptism?" Why do they not invent some form of "planting," in order to follow out the allusion used, Rom. vi. 5? Why not persist in the superstitious practice used long ago of putting on white garments at baptism, seeing we are told, Gal. iii. 27, that "as many as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ." But these texts of Scripture determine nothing about the external mode of baptism. They intimate, that as Christ died, was buried, and rose again in a public character, believers have communion with him therein, for all the benefit of his death and resurrection, and that baptism exhibits and seals this privilege to them, so that they are said to be "baptized into his death" and "buried with him by" or

through "baptism," whereby also they are "raised with him." Nor is there any allusion at all to the mode of baptism, but to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, in which believers have communion with him, according to what is exhibited in their baptism. And some kind of external burial is no more necessary to represent this, than some form of crucifixion is necessary to represent their being crucified with Christ.

From the whole, it appears how unreasonable it is to plead for immersion as essential to the ordinance of baptism. The word *baptise*, does not determine that mode more than any other. There is no determination of it by apostolic practice, nor by any Scripture allusion to such a mode of washing. On the other hand, without denying the validity of baptism otherwise performed, we may safely affirm, that it is rightly dispensed by sprinkling or pouring water upon the baptized. A purification by sprinkling is called a baptism, Heb. ix. 10. John, and the apostles of Christ, baptized such multitudes in a short time, as could not well be accomplished by immersion, and sometimes in such circumstances as did not readily afford opportunity for it. Besides, the application of the spiritual benefit signified by baptism, is in Scripture often expressed by sprinkling and pouring out, Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Heb. x. 22; Acts, ii. 33; Tit. iii. 5-6.

## ESSAY XII.

WHO HAVE A RIGHT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL?<sup>1</sup>

IT is expressly enjoined in the Word of God, that we “should contend earnestly for the *faith* once delivered to the saints.” This faith includes all the ordinances, as well as all the doctrines of Christ; and it is no less our duty to contend for the former than for the latter. They have been equally opposed, and there is the same necessity why we should contend for both. Among the ordinances of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel holds a principal place, and it has accordingly, in all ages, met with considerable opposition. Like other ordinances, it has been often grievously abused and perverted to the most unworthy purposes. By many who would be esteemed the wise of the world, it is counted unworthy of the attention of any but the vulgar. It has been called, “the foolishness of preaching.” The infidels of our time, and some who, by attachment to the Arian and Socinian system, are making progress to infidelity, cry it down as a human device

<sup>1</sup> From the Christian Magazine, vol. i. p. 313.

or piece of craft. This need not, however, occasion any great surprise. The spirit of the world savoureth not the things that be of God ; and the enemies of the truth naturally wish to have full scope to propagate their delusions. But it is matter of regret, that the preaching of the Gospel is, by many who attend upon it, too little regarded as an ordinance of Christ. And some of the professed friends of Gospel-doctrine so far mistake the nature and institution of preaching, as to engage in it without any other call than their own abundant zeal, and even to plead, that all should do so who find themselves qualified. To shew that such a sentiment and practice have no warrant from the Word of God, the following observations are offered.

1. The preaching of the Gospel is an ordinance that Christ hath appointed for the gathering and edification of his church ; and being a matter of positive institution, all that belongs to the administration of it can be learned only from the rules and approved examples recorded in the New Testament. It is not like those duties that are incumbent upon all, according to the opportunities they have in Providence for the performance of them, and which, without any express commandment, could be urged upon Christians by the common principles of moral obligation, such as to teach and admonish one another. And because the obligation to such moral duties depends not upon positive institution, it must equally extend to all ; and no person whatever can be free from it. But it is otherwise as to the preaching of the Gospel, which is a positive institution of Christ ; for it is a duty enjoined upon

some only ; yea some are even absolutely prohibited from intermeddling in it. 1 Cor. xiv. 34, " Let your women keep silence in the churches ; for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." 1 Tim. ii. 12, " I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." This could not be the case, if preaching were a matter of common moral obligation. All arguments, therefore, taken from general principles, to prove the obligation that Christians are under to exert themselves for promoting the cause of religion, are to no purpose here, as they do not prove that the preaching of the Gospel is one of those means that all are warranted to use.

2. There is an instituted ministry of the ordinances of Christ to his church, by such ministers and office-bearers as he hath appointed ; and the preaching of the Gospel is frequently referred to as a principal part of that ministry. We read of a " ministry of the word," Acts, vi. 4 ; a " ministry received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God," Acts, xx. 24 ; a " ministry of reconciliation," 2 Cor. v. 18 ; and a " ministry into " which some are " put " by the Lord Christ. 1 Tim. i. 12, " I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, *putting me into the ministry.*" This ministry is not left open to all the members of the church, in such a manner as that every one who finds himself disposed, or supposes himself to be qualified, may engage in it as he finds opportunity ; but office-bearers are appointed for it by the Lord Christ. Eph. iv. 11, 12. " And he gave some

apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ." Some of these officers were extraordinary and temporary ; they had an extraordinary call, and were endued with miraculous powers, which have now ceased. But that the work of the ministry, and particularly the preaching of the Gospel, is to continue to the end of the world, appears from the promise given for the encouragement of those that are employed in it : Matth. xxviii. 20, " Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." There are accordingly ordinary officers, pastors, and teachers, appointed for the continued exercise of that ministry.

To these instituted office-bearers is this ministry exclusively committed.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Christ in respect of the public ministry thereof by preaching, is frequently mentioned as a special and peculiar *trust* committed to them. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19, 20,—“ All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation ; To-wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.” See also 1 Tim. i. 11, and vi. 20. In all the passages of Scripture, where we have any mention of a charge or

<sup>1</sup> Mark, xvi. 15 ; Matth. xxviii. 18–20.



commission to preach the Gospel, it would be easy to shew that it is directed only to persons in office ; and a variety of names are given to those that are employed in the ministry of the Word, all of which are expressive of their peculiar office. They are called *Ministers*, 1 Cor. iii. 5 ; *Officers* and *Stewards*, 1 Cor. iv. 1 ; *Ambassadors for Christ*, 2 Cor. v. 20 ; *Heralds* (so the word *preacher* signifies) and *Teachers*, 2 Tim. i. 11.

There is no room to plead here, that though a *constant ministry* of the Word, in a *pastoral charge*, belongs only to persons in office, yet all may *occasionally* exercise their gifts in preaching the Gospel. The Word of God acknowledges no such distinction as that between a constant and an occasional ministry of the Gospel. It enjoins upon those who are called to the work of the ministry, not an occasional, but a constant exercise of that ministry ; so that whether they be fixed pastors, or itinerant preachers, they are not to entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, but must be devoted wholly to the work of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> And because they must thus devote their time and attention to this work, the Word of God also enjoins that a maintenance be given them by those to whom they exercise their ministry.<sup>2</sup> This is a farther evidence that the ministry of the Word is restricted to persons in office, and that they are to devote their time and attention to it, not entangling themselves in the prosecution of any secular business.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 13-16 ; 2 Tim. ii. 4 ; and iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 7-14 ; Gal. vi. 6 ; 1 Tim. v. 17.

3. Those only can be warrantably employed in administering the ordinances of Christ, and particularly in preaching the Gospel, who are thereunto called by him, and admitted according to the rule laid down in the Word. And none can be warrantably acknowledged, and received as office-bearers to whom that ministry is committed, without some proper evidence of their being called and sent by Christ. Rom. x. 15, "*How shall they preach except they be sent?*" How, without this, can they do it warrantably or profitably? And, without some evidence of this, what ground have we to expect a blessing in waiting upon their ministry? It is not a mere providential sending that is here meant, as if there were no more necessary than abilities, and an opportunity of exercising them; for so the ministers of Satan may be sent, and a lying spirit was thus sent among the prophets of Ahab. But this sending means the call of Christ intimated in such a way as to afford a warrant to the preacher, and with such evidence as may satisfy the consciences of the hearers in receiving his ministry as the ordinance of Christ. A zeal for God, a strong desire of being useful to souls, and even a persuasion of having the call of Christ, cannot be sufficient warrant to the preacher, far less can the hearers, in receiving him, proceed upon grounds so uncertain.

The apostles, and some other ministers in the beginning of the Christian dispensation, had an extraordinary call and immediate mission by Christ; and this was evinced to all by the miraculous powers bestowed on them. These powers have now ceased,

and it is vain to plead any such immediate call. The ordinary call of Christ to the work of the ministry is intimated by or through the church, judging thereof by the rules laid down in the Word; and according to these rules, they that are found qualified and called, are to be admitted to the ministry by those who are already invested with it. The charge is given to the office-bearers of the church, to commit that ministry which they have received, to "faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."<sup>1</sup> And for their direction in this matter, the qualifications necessary, both as to character and abilities, are laid down in the Word, particularly in 1 Tim. chap. iii. Of these qualifications they are required to make an impartial and deliberate examination, so as to "lay hands suddenly on no man;"<sup>2</sup> but to admit to the office of the ministry those only who, by this trial, they have reason to judge, are called and sent by Christ.

It is vain to distinguish here between a pastor of a congregation and an itinerant preacher; as if the call of the church were necessary only to the former, and not to the latter. If by the call of the church is meant only the choice and call of the people, it is admitted, that this is necessary to fix a pastoral relation to that part of the flock; but a regular admission to the work of the ministry, by the office-bearers of the church, is equally necessary in the case of all who are employed in it, whether they have a fixed charge or not. Ti-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 2; Tit. i. 5.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 22.

mothy, who had no fixed charge, and though pointed out by prophecy as designed for the ministry, was ordained and admitted to it by the presbytery. And though Paul and Barnabas had an extraordinary call, yet the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch are directed to separate and send them out, according to the call of the Holy Ghost, to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> A principal design of this seems to have been, to set an example of procedure to the church in after times.

It appears, then, that the preaching of the Gospel is an ordinance or institution of Christ; that the ministry of that and other ordinances belongs only to those office-bearers whom he hath appointed and commissioned for that end; and that, in ordinary cases, none can be acknowledged as sent by him, but such as are admitted to the ministry in the way above mentioned. These observations would have admitted a much larger illustration; but as they are, they may assist an attentive reader to consult his Bible for further satisfaction. It is necessary, however, to take some notice of the arguments urged in support of the opposite sentiment, and of the attempts to prove that every man who is qualified has a right to preach the Gospel, without any regular call and admission by the church.

And, 1st, It is pretended that this is enjoined upon all who are qualified for it, because Christians are called to teach, exhort, and admonish one

<sup>1</sup> Acts, xiii.

another. But, even supposing that this were to be understood of preaching, or a public ministry of the Word, such directions, though expressed generally, would not apply to all, but to those only who are called to the ministry, according to the limitation and restriction laid down in other places of Scripture. There is, however, no necessity of understanding these directions in that sense. The Scripture evidently distinguishes the preaching of the Gospel, or that public teaching which belongs to an instituted ministry, from that private teaching which is competent to, and obligatory on, all Christians by the law of love. The latter is enjoined upon some, to whom the former is absolutely prohibited: Compare 1 Tim. ii. 12, with Titus ii. 3, 4. Christians in a private station have abundant opportunity, and generally much more than they improve, to exercise their talents, in teaching their families, friends, and neighbours, without interfering with that public ministry of the Word which is committed to those who are specially called thereto.

2*d*, Some passages of Scripture are urged, wherein it is supposed all Christians are enjoined to exercise their qualifications in public teaching or preaching; particularly, Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8; 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11. These Scriptures, on the contrary, restrict the public ministry of the Word to those invested with an office, and it is that ministry which belongs to their office that is spoken of. In Rom. xii., persons in office are exhorted to apply themselves faithfully and diligently to that ministry to which they are called, whether it be a ministry of the Word and of spiritual things, or a



ministry of temporal things, and that without envying others who have a different office and ministry. And, to enforce this exhortation, the apostle compares the church to the natural body, verse 4, in which "all members have not the same office;" but one member is appointed to one office, and another member to a different office. And so it is in the church of Christ, verse 5. The same allusion is applied more largely, 1 Cor. xii. 27, 28, to illustrate this very point. The other passage, 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11, is of the very same import; those in office are called to exercise their ministry faithfully, whether it be in spiritual or temporal things; and are addressed as *stewards*, verse 10. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Some are led to mistake the meaning of these Scriptures, by misunderstanding the word *gift*, as if it meant only talents or qualifications; whereas in these, and many other passages, it means a certain office and ministry to which one is appointed. Eph. iv. 8, 11, "He gave gifts unto men; he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry," &c. 1 Tim. iv. 14, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Timothy was ordained to the office of the ministry in consequence of special direction by the spirit of prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Tim. i. 18.



3d, It is also supposed, and much insisted on by some, that both precept and example for the preaching of the Gospel, by what they “call every gifted brother,” may be found in 1 Cor. xiv. The 31st verse is particularly urged in support of their opinion. “For ye may *all* prophesy, one by one, that *all* may learn, and *all* may be comforted.” But universal terms, such as are here used, are limited or extended according to the subject; and that even in the same verse, as in chap. xv. 22. In like manner here, the *all* that may prophesy, are not the same *all* that may learn and be comforted. The latter may extend to all the members of the church, and even to strangers who might come into their assemblies; the former could apply only to a few. Some members of the church are expressly prohibited from public teaching, verse 34. Besides, all were not prophets, chap. xii. 29, and therefore all neither could prophesy, nor could warrantably attempt it. The state of matters referred to in that chapter seems to have been this: the church at Corinth was numerous, and had many ministers, of whom the most, if not all, were endowed with some miraculous power, such as that of prophecy, of speaking strange languages, and the like; they were proud of these gifts, and forward to shew them, verse 26, which occasioned disorder in their assemblies for worship; those that had the gift of tongues prevented the prophets from exercising their more edifying ministry, and the prophets did not modestly give place to one another. These disorders the apostle re-proves, and exhorts them to exercise their gifts in a more regular and decent manner for the edification of

the church. This being the case, it is strange to plead this passage as a warrant for the preaching of the Gospel by those who are in no office, and who neither have any miraculous powers to prove their immediate call by Christ to the work of the ministry, nor are admitted thereto by the call of the church.

4<sup>th</sup>, Further, we are referred to Acts, viii. 1-4, for an example of the preaching of the Gospel by persons not in office. We are told, verse 1, that "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad—*except the apostles.*" And it is said, verse 4, "*they* that were scattered abroad, went every where *preaching the word.*" From this it is argued, that "*the church in general* proclaimed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus." But why mention the church in general, when the method of reasoning used would equally prove that the church universally did so; and the absurdity of such reasoning must be evident upon a very little consideration of the subject. How absurd to suppose that the *all* mentioned, verse 1, refers to and comprehends all the members of that church, and that the thousands and tens of thousands belonging to it, were all scattered abroad, or that they all, men, women, and children, went *every where preaching* the Word. Are we not told, verse 3, that some of them, probably many of them, both men and women, were haled and committed to prison? And, had all the members of the church been driven from Jerusalem, how were the apostles to be employed? Did they only tarry to gather a new church? When it is said, verse 3, that Saul entered into every

house, how absurd would it be to suppose that it is meant of every house in Jerusalem, or even every house in which there was a Christian? The expression also, *every where*, verse 4, must be limited. It would therefore be unreasonable to object against a proper limitation of the word *all*, verse 1. And about the just limitation of it we need be at no loss. They were all scattered abroad except the apostles. What reason can there be for mentioning only the apostles as excepted; while there were so many other members of that church still remaining at Jerusalem, but this, that the persons referred to were of the same description in general with the apostles, persons in office, ministers of the church? Others might also be scattered, but these are here spoken of; and Philip, an evangelist, and endowed with miraculous powers, is mentioned as one of them.

5th, As to the case of Apollos, which some urge as affording irresistible evidence to prove that all who are qualified may preach the Gospel, a few words may suffice. He spake boldly in the synagogue, the practice of which is no rule to the Christian church. He was not yet acquainted with some important doctrines of the New-Testament church, much less could he be well acquainted with the ordinances of it. Two intelligent Christians instructed him more perfectly in the way of God. He was recommended by the brethren to the church at Corinth; and there he laboured successfully in the work of the ministry. And what is all this to the purpose for which his example is urged? We have no information, indeed, of what time, nor in what manner, he was called and admitted to the work of the ministry,

more than we have about many others mentioned in Scripture; but he is expressly called a minister, and is, once and again, classed with the chiefest of the apostles.<sup>1</sup>

Lest these and the like arguments should be found insufficient, recourse is had by some to the plea of pure motives and good designs, with a kind of appeal to the judgment of the great day, and profession of trust, that they are such as will not then be condemned. It is indeed a great satisfaction, to have the testimony of conscience to the purity of motives in every part of conduct that is warranted by the Word, and also to know that the judgment of the saints at the great day will be a judgment of mercy. But every part of the truth of Christ will be determined at that day in exact conformity to what is now declared in the Word. And the purest motives, and most noble designs, are no rule of conduct to any; much less can they give satisfaction to others.

These observations concerning the institution of a Gospel ministry, the writer is persuaded, are agreeable to the Word. If they be not, it would be idle to appeal to his motives in support of them. But he can freely say that they are here offered to the public, not from a desire of controversy, but from a conviction that, at this time, it is necessary, on different accounts, to call people's attention to the mind and will of Christ, as revealed in the Word concerning this subject. Let not such of the friends of religion as may be of different

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 12; iii. 5, 22.

sentiments from what are here expressed be offended at an attempt, in the spirit of meekness, to remove their mistakes. Nor let them impute it to envy, pride, or selfish principles. In perfect consistency with all that he has advanced, the writer can say,—“Would to God that all the Lord’s people were prophets!”

It is a necessary consequence of what is advanced on this subject, that all should be careful that the ministry of the ordinances upon which they attend, be such as is warranted in the Word. If none can warrantably preach except they be sent, we cannot warrantably attend on the ministry of any, but those who, we have reason to believe, have Christ’s call and mission. And if it be an objection against the pastor of a congregation, that he is imposed upon the flock, without their choice, it is no less an objection against a preacher, if he be not admitted to the ministry of the Word, by those whose office it is to examine his qualifications and judge of his call. It must, however, be acknowledged, that to have gone through the ordinary forms of admission, is no sufficient evidence of any one having the call of Christ. The outward forms may be observed, while the spirit and design of them is neglected, and the rule of the Word transgressed. Nor can any be acknowledged as sent by Christ, unless their character correspond with that pointed out and required in the Word, and unless the doctrine they teach be the Gospel of Christ. None can be supposed to have a mission from Christ who do not bring his message, 2 John, verse 10,—“If there come any unto you and bring not this

doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." But when we are favoured with the pure Gospel, and an administration of it agreeable to the Word, let us wait upon it diligently ; regarding the preaching of the Gospel as an ordinance of Christ, and depending on his promised blessing to make it effectual : For when "*the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.*"



## APPENDIX.

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REMARKS on a REVIEW of Mr WHYTOCK'S VINDICATION of PRESBYTERY in the Edinburgh Quarterly Magazine, vol. ii., pp. 274–290 ; vol. iii., pp. 26–42. By the Author of the *Vindication*.

*To the Editor of the Quarterly Magazine.*

SIR,—As you have admitted into your Magazine a Review of Mr Whytock's *Vindication of Presbytery*, your impartiality will, no doubt, induce you to admit some remarks upon that review ; more especially, as they are necessary to correct the mistakes and misrepresentation into which the reviewer has fallen. A large discussion of the controversy would be very improper in such a publication as yours, and no such thing is intended ; yet even a very brief statement of the author's sentiments, contrasted with the representation given of them in the review, may take up more room than could be wished.

The review is not yet finished, nor can any conjecture be formed as to what time it may be so. In the course

of some months, the reviewer has got through eighteen pages of the *Vindication*, at the expense of thirty-two of a similar size and type in your Miscellany. Travelling at the same rate, he may get to the end of it in about two years, which would be rather long to leave his mistakes uncorrected. A correction of some of them in the meantime may be the means of preventing similar errors in his progress. Besides, that part of the subject already reviewed, will easily admit of a separate consideration.

In a review, one would expect to find a fair representation of an author's sentiments, and a just, though summary, statement of his arguments; but how far short this comes of answering such an expectation, any one may be easily satisfied who will take the trouble of comparing it with the *Vindication*. The reviewer appears to be possessed of sufficient penetration; and it would be very uncharitable to suppose him capable of any wilful misrepresentation. The most favourable construction that the case will admit, is, that through an excess of confidence that he understood what the author would say, he did not pay that attention to his words, which he otherwise would have done. Yet this will not fully account for the manner in which the review is conducted. There is, in some instances, an attempt at quibbling or cavilling, which has more the appearance of seeking victory over an opponent, than the illustration of truth. Of this, an example or two may be given.

I had said,—“An assembly of Christians actually convened in one place for religious purposes, is called a church, i. Cor. xi. 18; xiv. 19, 28, 34, 35.” The reviewer, referring to these words, says, he (the author) “seems to intimate that it (an assembly) is not called a church, but as *actually convened*, which is to say, that as often as a Christian congregation is dismissed, it is unchurched!”—And again,—“An *assembly of Christians* actually con-

vened in one place, which consequently ceases to be a church when not *actually* convened." It would be abusing the patience of the public to enter into a discussion of the propriety of my expression. It is better to give way to a tautology than to be misunderstood. After citing the above texts, I immediately add, "It is evident the Assembly, or Church Meeting, is intended."—(*Vind.* p. 4.) But how can this intimate that Christians are unchurched when the meeting is dismissed? It will intimate that they were not *in* the church in that sense of the term, but they might still be in it in another sense. Women were forbidden to speak *in* the church,—were they, therefore, unchurched when they were allowed to speak at home? And what does the reviewer himself intimate, when, in the course of a few lines, he expresses the same sentiment? The Apostle "terms the body which assembles *the church*, as well as the assembly of that body when actually met." Have I said anything to the contrary? Or, must a sentiment from the mouth of a Presbyterian be arrant nonsense, while the same, from the mouth of an Independent, must be received as the response of an oracle? I had said that the church mentioned Matt. xviii. 17, *Tell the church*, &c. "is the one universal church, though common sense will readily suggest that our telling the offence can only be to that *part* of it to which we have access, and to which the cognizance of the matter properly belongs." And I assign a reason why this may be called *telling the church*. But the reviewer, after quoting the above words, adds "This is a very strange sentence: It might be construed to import that Christ's direction is not agreeable to common sense, and that, therefore, the brother may dispense with it, and instead of telling the *one universal church*, as directed, he may tell it only to a *part* of it." This is a very strange misconstruction of a very plain sentence. If common sense will readily suggest a consistent meaning of the direction,

certainly the meaning must be very obvious to common sense ; and how strange, to consider an assertion of this as intimating that it is contrary to common sense ! The brother does not dispense with the direction given, though he do not tell the offence to *every individual* of the Church of Christ ; he complies with it when he tells it to those of the church to whom the cognizance of the matter belongs. If a physician should direct the reviewer to go and bathe in the sea, in order to remove some malady, would not common sense direct him to go to some particular *part* of the sea for that purpose ? And how would he stare if any one should tell him, that the prescription of his physician was contrary to common sense, because he could not get all the waters of the sea collected into one spot, that he might use the remedy prescribed !

Other instances of similar cavilling might have been given, but these are sufficient to shew how little light upon the subject can be expected from a review conducted in that way. Misrepresentation of the author's words and sentiments affect more nearly the subject in controversy. Some of these, contained in the first part of the review, shall be now pointed out.

I am censured by the reviewer for giving an incorrect statement of the principles of the Independents, particularly in stating it as their principle, that the government and discipline of the church belongs to, and is to be exercised by, the members of the church in common, and that the elders are only to act as presidents and moderators for preserving order. Whereas, the reviewer informs us, *some* of them “ maintain that it belongs to office-bearers *alone to rule officially*,—but that the acts of this rule must be exercised in the presence and with the consent of the assembled church.” But there was no reason for this correction. When laying down the principles of the Independents, as generally maintained by them, I

added, that these “are adopted, with certain modifications.” This, it seems, is one of these modifications, and it is expressly mentioned in the *Vindication*. “Others seem to give all power of government to the elders, while they pretend to *ascribe to the people no other interest or share in the government, but that they may be ruled by their own consent.*”—*Vind.* p. 23. One would think that the reviewer must have been at a great loss for something to find fault with, when he pitched on this. The difference between the account given by the author and that given by the reviewer, is hardly perceptible: Only the latter speaks of an *official* rule which belongs to the elders *alone*. It would possibly have cast some light upon the subject, if he had explained the nature and extent of that *official* rule which belongs to the elders, and told us what other rule is left to the people for their share.

Presbyterians are accused, and the author of the *Vindication* along with them, of rearing the fabric of their system on arbitrary and false acceptations of the word *church*. But the author has not founded one argument upon the signification of that word. It is the reviewer, with other Independents, that builds and supports his system in that way. He endeavours to prove (p. 278-283), that always when the Church of Christ is mentioned, it means either the invisible church or a single congregation. It was, therefore, necessary to shew that, according to the use of the word in Scripture, the meaning of it is not to be restricted in that way. The author of the *Vindication* accordingly, begins with mentioning “some acceptations of the word *church* in the *New Testament*,” agreeably to the common mode of speaking in such cases, though it might have been better to have called them examples of the use and application of that term.

It is, however, a strange account that the reviewer gives of these acceptations (p. 277, 278). “Accordingly,”



says he, “our author has given no less than five different acceptations of that word, though he numbers only four of them, viz. 1. *The Invisible church.* 2. *The catholic visible church.* 3. *An associated church.* 4. *An assembly of Christians;*” and we are told “under the second of these, the author slips in a *church employed in a ministry*, which we may call a ministerial church, or a church composed of a clergy.” From this account, any one that has not read the *Vindication*, must naturally conclude that the author of that treatise supposes that there are *two churches of Christ, both of them catholic*, or universal, the one visible, the other invisible; but my words are, “1. The church is sometimes mentioned in reference to its invisible state, and as it is in the sight of God. 2. The church is sometimes spoken of in reference to its external and visible state.” The Church of Christ is *one*, although, according to the rule which we must judge by, we are bound to account as members of it, and entitled to its external privileges, some who are not real saints. The Scripture always speaks of *one universal church*, but then some things spoken concerning it *refer to its visible*, and other things to *its invisible state*; 1 Cor. xii. As to an *associated church*, we shall see by and by what the reviewer means by it. The author of the *Vindication* has not used that expression. He no doubt considered every *church* as including *association* in the very idea of it.

The reviewer proceeds to examine what he calls the author’s “imaginary acceptations of the word church,” and they are imaginary indeed, though they owe their existence to his own imagination and not to mine. “He says, the word church signifies a *catholic visible church*, consisting of all those that profess the true religion, and their children.” Now I do *not* say so. The church of Christ is visible, and I say that it is sometimes spoken of *in reference to its visible state*; but the word *church* does not signify either its visibility or invisibility; which of these



characters are referred to, must be determined by what is said concerning it, and not by any peculiar signification of the word *church*. The whole body of professing Christians, even all that call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who, by this profession, are separated from the world, are called *the church*: Or “the church,” whether spoken of in reference to its visible or invisible state, is represented as *one*, and called *one body*. This is the case in 1 Cor. xii. throughout, particularly verse 28th, “And he hath set some in *the church*, first apostles, &c.” No, says the reviewer, “there is no other church mentioned in that twelfth chapter, but the one invisible body of Christ, and the particular church of Corinth, by which it was visibly represented.” He accordingly adduces verse 12th and 13th as an evidence that the invisible church is there meant, because to be *baptized into one body* and to *drink into one spirit*, “will not apply to all who profess the true religion;” and he says that it is on this mystical body that the various gifts mentioned in verse 28th are conferred” (p. 283, 284). No doubt there are several things said of the church in this chapter which principally refer to it as invisible; but even in the verses quoted by the reviewer, there is also a reference to its visible state. Baptism, surely, is something external and visible; and there is no reason why we should confine what is said about the participation of the Spirit to those saving operations which are peculiar to the members of the church invisible. The miraculous gifts, mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, might be conferred on hypocrites as well as real saints. And that distinction among the members of the church, on account of which some are compared to hands, and others to eyes, will apply only to the church in its external and visible state; for, as to saving attainments and privileges, there is no such distinction.

Those things mentioned in this chapter which will not

apply to the church invisible, the reviewer would apply to the particular church at Corinth, on the ground that “every particular congregation of visible saints is a representation of that one body which is invisible,” and he tells us that the church at Corinth had all the gifts enumerated, and that “these were in some degree conferred upon every church planted by the apostles.” But not to examine, at present, the conceit that every particular congregation is a visible representation of that one body which is invisible, it may be fairly argued that if, upon that ground, the gifts and privileges here spoken of are applied to the church at Corinth, they must also be applied to every church, whether planted by the apostles or not; and yet we know that the church at Rome, though very flourishing, was not yet endowed with all these gifts. Nor will every thing that is spoken of in this chapter apply even to the church at Corinth, otherwise than as it was a part of that one body, that one catholic church which the apostle describes. Surely the reviewer will not imagine that all who were “baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles,” verse 13th, were members of the church at Corinth,—that the apostle himself was so, though he had been now some years absent from them,—or that, though he as an apostle might have the privilege to be counted a member of every church, a like account was to be made of all that were baptized.

The reviewer alleges that “*a catholic visible church* exists no where as a church except in the imagination,” and enquires, “how it can be a *visible church* unless it were visibly united as such? Where does it hold communion together as one visible body, either in the Lord’s Supper, or in any other church ordinance? Where is it even united under one *visible* ecclesiastical government and discipline?” (p. 285). But because no man has ever seen all the professors of Christianity, will he therefore pretend that they have no existence as one body or church? He never saw

all the collection of waters called the sea, will he therefore maintain that it exists only in the imagination? Is there no visible union and communion in the Lord's Supper, unless they all sit down at one table, within the walls of one house? \* Nay, are not even Independent churches in some degree united "under one visible government and discipline?" The reviewer cannot collect all the members of different churches to excommunicate an unworthy brother, but he reckons that they are all so far bound by a decision of that kind, as to hold him excommunicated if he come among them. But to go on with the review.

The author affirms, "says the reviewer," that the word church also signifies *that part of the church which is employed in a ministry.*" The author affirms rather the contrary. "We do not say that the word *church*, taken by itself, means the elders exclusively, any more than we can admit that it means the people exclusively; but the general term which comprehends both is frequently used, while the application of it is to be restricted or extended, as the case requires." (*Vind.* p. 45). And it is the same sentiment which is expressed (p. 3), that "this designation is frequently given to a part, because of its relation to the whole, and the part particularly meant is determined" (not by the word *church*, but) "by what is said concerning it, and by other circumstances." Surely, this is a very different thing from affirming that 'the word church signifies' the ministry. My observation is stated in opposition to the opinion of Independents who maintain that the word church always signifies the people or church-members in general, or the people even as distinguished from their elders. The general term "the church" may be, and is, used when a part only is spoken of, "just as in the natural body, the general term is often

\* See this subject treated more at large, in the Essay on the Unity of the Visible Church, pp. 116—126.—ED.

used, when some particular member is especially meant, 1 Cor. xii. 12." (P. 3-4). But, says the reviewer, "those words will not support his assertion; they shew, on the contrary, that it is not any particular member that is called the body;" and he cites also, verses 14-19, "The body is not one member but many, &c." The verse quoted (1 Cor. xii. 12) supports the assertion (which is all it was quoted for) that the church is *one*, like the natural body, consisting of many members holding various offices; and therefore the general term *the church* may be used when a part only is meant, just as we may say that the body is diseased while yet the disease is lodged in some particular part. This the reviewer terms "an absurd idea," and conceives that, when the apostle says that "the body is not one member but many, and these many are one body," he speaks as if he had purposely intended to refute it. But his language only shews the justice of it, inasmuch as all the members belong to the body. And, agreeably to this mode of speech, the apostle says to the Corinthians, verse 27, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular;" while yet he tells us, verse 13, that this one body comprehended all Christians, Jews, and Gentiles, bond and free. We are told, Acts. xv. 3, that Paul and Barnabas, with other commissioners, were "brought on their way by the church." Are we not to understand this as meant of a part of the church? Or can the reviewer suppose that they had, for their convoy, all the members of the church at Antioch, men, women, and children? Or (in case he do not acknowledge children to be members of the church) even all the men and women? Nay, he himself admits that the name may be given to a part; for he tells us in one page, that the church is "a particular congregation, with its elders;" and, in the very next page, that the word "is frequently used to distinguish the body of the people *from their office-bearers.*"

The reviewer is, however, very positive that “there is not a passage in all the New Testament where the word *church* signifies an ecclesiastical court, or an assembly of church-rulers distinct from the people.” If, by this assertion, he means, that the word *church* does not, by its signification, determine whether the meeting to which it is applied be composed of church rulers or not, nobody will contradict him : But if he mean, as he must do if he speak to the point, that the word *church* is not in all the New Testament applied to a meeting of church rulers, the assertion has nothing to recommend it, but the confidence wherewith it is uttered. There is at least one passage where the word is applied to such an assembly, Acts xv. 22. The Assembly, composed of the apostles and elders, verse 6, is called a church, verse 22. If this designation is given to any assembly of Christians, 1 Cor. xiv. 19, 28, 34, 35,—if it be given to a town-meeting, or even to a mob at Ephesus, Acts, xix. 39-45,—the reviewer need not be surprised if it be given to an assembly of elders, however unwarrantable he may suppose such an assembly to be.

The reviewer proceeds to quote from the *Vindication*:—The Author says, “The designation, *a church*, is frequently given to a particular association of Christians. Accordingly, we read of the church at Jerusalem, at Antioch, &c., and we read also of a church in certain houses, Rom. xvi. 5 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 19 ; Col. iv. 15.” These words the reviewer quotes accurately ; but in his commentary he strangely alters the expression and misrepresents the meaning. He immediately adds after the above quotation,—“By this associated church he (the author) means an association of different worshipping congregations into one church, and under one classical presbyterial government ; and he would have his readers to believe, that the church at Jerusalem, at Antioch, &c., were each of them an association of distinct wor-



shipping assemblies. But he supposes what is still more wonderful, viz. that each of the churches which met in certain houses were associated congregations. Yet, within the compass of a few lines, he contradicts himself, producing the church at Corinth (one of his associated churches) as a specimen of an assembly of Christians *actually convened in one place*. What shall we say to all this? Never did Proteus assume so many shapes as the advocates for Presbyterian church-government have given to the church."

What shall *we* say to all this? Instead of *reviewing* it is downright *raving*. All the fantastic shapes which the reviewer discovers proceed only from his own fancy. But let us compare them with the author's words. The reviewer begins thus: "By this associated church he means an association of different congregations." What *associated church* does the reviewer mean? Why does he change the terms? I speak of a *particular association of Christians*, whether those of a whole city, or those that assembled in certain particular houses. Every church, in the very nature of it, is an "associated" church; but every association of Christians, called a church in the New Testament, was not an association of *congregations*. Some of them were, and others were not. I neither utter nor "suppose" the wonderful assertion imputed to me, "that each of the churches which met in certain houses were associated congregations;" that is, a plurality of congregations under one presbytery. I have all along spoken of them as single congregations, but refer to them as evidences of a plurality of congregations in that church of which they were a part. All the Christians at Ephesus were called "a church," and those that met in one of their houses are called by the same name. Nay, but the author "contradicts himself," and is so stupid too, as to do so "within the compass of a few lines." What



is the evidence of this charge ? Why, I mention the church at Corinth as an instance that a particular association of Christians is called a church, “and within the compass of a few lines, I produce” (not *the church at Corinth*, as alleged, but) a verse or two in an *epistle to the Corinthians*, to prove that the name *church* is given to an assembly or church-meeting ! Thus the wonderful assertions, contradictions, and fantastic shapes imputed to me, have no other foundation, than such a change of my words and misrepresentation of my sentiments, as could only be expected from a novice, or from a veteran in the art of controversy.

It might now be proper to take some notice of the reviewer’s sentiments about the word *church* ; and if one were to copy after his example, it would be easy to find, in his account, more acceptations of it than he imputes to me. There is, 1. what we may call a *literal church*, any assembly, civil or religious, lawful or unlawful, p. 278. 2. A *national typical church*, “the nation of Israel in the wilderness,”—“the church of old Israel,” of which the church of the redeemed is the antitype (*Ibid*). 3. The *catholic invisible church*, the church of the first-born, which “to us is at present invisible, and so a matter of faith, not of sight” (p. 279, 280). 4. A *congregational typical church*, “a congregation of visible believers, called a *church*, not merely because it is a single society, but *also* because it is the only appointed *visible representation* on earth of the true catholic *invisible church*” (p. 285). 5. A *formal complete church*, or “a *particular congregation* with its elders” (p. 288). 6. A *material church*, the body of the people distinguished from their office-bearers (p. 289) ; or “the body which assembles as well as the assembly of that body when actually met” (p. 285). “These are the elements of the reviewer’s system, the materials of which

he rears the whole fabric ;” and they are, no doubt, abundant enough, if they were sufficient ; but that they are not, even a slight examination may satisfy.

He tells us that “the word church throughout the whole New Testament has but one uniform meaning, and denotes always one congregation or assembly, whether lawful or unlawful” (p. 278.) But this definition, or account of the signification of the word *church*, is rather defective, and leaves out of view some of the most essential ideas included in it. Every crowd or collection of people is not, and may not be, called a church ; but it signifies an assembly called together for some special purpose. Hence it is applied to the whole body of Christians, as called out of the world and separated from it. It is principally on account of this calling into one body, and to the same privileges and duties, that they are denominated one church or assembly : it is not, as the reviewer alleges, principally on account of some kind of local union, or meeting together in the same place. It is of no consequence to tell us that the word *church*, in the singular number, always denotes one congregation or assembly. This is a truism. In whatever sense it is one church, in the same sense it is one congregation. Yet one church, or great congregation, may comprehend several churches,—the same name being given to the several subdivisions, greater or lesser, of which it is composed : just as we may speak of “the French army” as one, while, at the same time, we speak of the army in Italy, the army of the Rhine, &c.

The reviewer proceeds to observe, that “when the word is applied to a sacred use, it always signifies one worshipping assembly or congregation. Thus the nation of Israel in the wilderness is called the *church*, Acts, vii. 38 ; it being one worshipping assembly, having one place of worship and one altar.” “The antitype of the church of old Israel, is the true Israel of God, &c.” Here there is room

for much animadversion. What does the reviewer mean by representing "the church of old Israel" as a type? Was it not really the church of God, or was it only a type of it? What does he mean by telling us that the nation of Israel *in the wilderness* is called a church? Stephen tells us that "Moses was with the church in the wilderness," but the church did not die with Moses, nor ceased when Israel passed into Canaan. It remained a church as really after as before, and is often called a church, or congregation, which is equivalent, compare Ps. xxii. 22.; Heb. ii. 12. It may be, the reviewer thinks his notion of a church, as "being one worshipping assembly," more applicable to Israel when collected in the camp in the wilderness, than when scattered over the land of Canaan. But it is absurd to suppose that near three millions of people could be comprised in one worshipping assembly, except in the case of such a miracle as when God spoke to him from mount Sinai. Or if he supposes that they were called a church, and one worshipping assembly, because they had "one place of worship, viz. the tabernacle of the congregation, and one altar," they had one place of worship and one altar also in the land of Canaan. Besides, if their church-state depended upon this, what became of it when, during the captivity, the temple and altar were in ruins? Was there no church, then, on the face of the earth? The reviewer next proceeds to shew, that the redeemed from among all nations are termed the church, but asserts that this church "is at present invisible, and so a matter of faith, not of sight." It is admitted that the church is frequently spoken of in reference to its invisible state, and true believers have a spiritual existence and privileges which are not visible to the world; but they have also an external character, profession, and privileges, which are visible to the world. And as it is by this external character and profession we are to judge of them,

we are warranted to make account of some persons as church members who may not be real saints; and the church of Christ in its external visible state in this world, comprehends both real saints and hypocrites. Hence the kingdom of heaven, or, which is the same thing, the church of Christ, is compared to a field where the tares grow among the wheat, and to a net which is filled with fishes both good and bad. It is upon the church, in this its external visible state, that the ordinances, gifts, and offices are bestowed. The reviewer, indeed, alleges that these gifts are bestowed upon the church invisible, the one mystical body of Christ, but he seems to have forgot that Judas had a bishoprick among the apostles, even by Christ's immediate call, and that many have prophesied and cast out devils in Christ's name, who had no saving faith in him.\*

He goes on to tell us that "the word church is most frequently used in the New Testament to denote a single congregation of visible saints or believers, united upon a profession of the one faith, and statedly coming together into one place to observe the ordinances of worship, &c. Such for certain," he tells us, "was the church at Jerusalem—and all the churches planted by the apostles without exception." And all we have in support of this confident assertion is a number of citations, chapter and verse, several of which (probably owing to the fault of the printer) have no more relation to the subject than 1 Chron. i. 1.† This is not the place to examine whether all the particular churches mentioned in the New Testament were such single congregations as he describes, but the reason he assigns for calling each of these congregations a church

\* See these remarks more fully illustrated by the author in his essay on "the Visible Church," p. 97–115.—ED.

† "Adam, Sheth, Enosh."

is somewhat singular. It is "not merely because it is a single society, answering to the ordinary acceptation of that word (church), but also because it is the only appointed *visible representation* on earth of the true catholic *invisible church*. Hence it is (he alleges) that the same things are said of it, and the same epithets applied to it. Is the catholic invisible church termed God's temple, building, house, &c. ? So, too, is a particular church of visible saints." What ! was it only to particular congregations or churches that the apostles applied such epithets ? What sort of a congregation was it which Peter addresses and calls "a spiritual house," 1 Pet. ii. 5 ? Did these "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythynia," belong to one congregation, "statedly coming together into one place" for the worship of God ? Every saint is the temple of God ; an habitation of God through the Spirit, and the spouse of Christ. But is every saint therefore *a church*, and a visible representation of the church invisible ? Or are these characters ascribed to them only in a kind of typical sense, as visible representations of some invisible beings to whom only such characters really belong ? Surely, the apostles addressed those Christians to whom they wrote, as real saints, "even as it was meet so to think of them," Phil. i. 7. They did not address them as saints only in appearance, and as being the house and temple of God only in a typical sense, or as representing others who really were so.

The whole amount of what the reviewer advances on this part of the subject is this, that always when the church of Christ is mentioned in the New Testament it is to be understood, either of the church invisible, or of a single worshipping congregation, as representing that invisible church ; consequently that the designation is never given to a plurality of congregations, and that a catholic church visible is a mere fancy without any foundation in the Word. As

to this last, we have already seen that the church of Christ is one. There is one body, one Lord and head, one faith, and one baptism. Sometimes it is spoken of in reference to its visible, and sometimes in reference to its invisible state, as in 1 Cor. xii. chap.; but in either view, it is still spoken of as one. Remarks upon the reviewer's sentiments concerning particular churches, must be reserved till another opportunity.

GEO. WHYTOCK.

DALKEITH, *Aug.* 15. 1800.









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